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LIGHT AND DARK IMAGERY IN HOPKINS'S MAJOR VERSE

by

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A THESIS

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## UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

## FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Light and Dark Imagery in Hopkins's Major Verse, submitted by Ronald Norman George Marken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.





## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to analyze Gerard Manley Hopkins's major verse in terms of its imagery of light and darkness. I have undertaken this study because the the overall structures of Hopkins's various patterns of imagery (particularly light and darkness) have been generally neglected by critics; because light and dark imagery is thematically crucial in Hopkins; because Hopkins is apparently deliberate in his persistent use of light-dark imagery; and because such imagery becomes, in his verse, a vehicle for the poet's most profound religious expressions.

The first chapter serves as an introduction to the poet's perspective as he observes and presents the interaction of God, man, and nature. Chapter II investigates Hopkins's use of light imagery drawn from nature (sun and stars, for example), as well as the relationship he sees between these worldly lights and the "light of the world" -- Christ. Since the image of fire is used by Hopkins more often than any other image, the third chapter is devoted entirely to fire. This chapter proceeds to show that the fire of man's spirit and the fire of nature merge, symbolically and ontologically, with the fire of Christ.



Chapter IV delves into the poet's vision of darkness, the imagery of his encounter with death, sinful man, and Self -- the dark night of the soul. Finally, in the last chapter, it is shown how Hopkins's poetry is capable of sustaining a balance, and of moving unparalyzed, in the face of the crucial paradoxes of existence (light and darkness, being opposites, become metaphors of this paradoxical situation).



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I HOPKINS'S VISION: "THE WORLD IS CHARGED". . . . .	1
II NATURAL LIGHT IMAGERY: "DAPPLE-DAWN-DRAWN". . . . .	14
III FIRE IMAGERY: "CATCH FIRE . . . DRAW FLAME" . . . . .	31
IV DARK IMAGERY: "THE BLEAR-ALL BLACK" . . . . .	42
V THE DICHOTOMY OF EXISTENCE: "THE BEAUTY OF TERROR" . . . . .	61
APPENDIX: A NOTE ON SUPERNATURAL LIGHT IMAGERY:	
"GLOW, GLORY IN THUNDER" . . . . .	88
FOOTNOTES . . . . .	93
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	98





## I

### HOPKINS'S VISION: "THE WORLD IS CHARGED"

Most criticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetry concerns itself with the implementation and influence of the poet's unique rhythm, metre, and diction, or with biographical matters relative to his verse and prose. Consequently, attention has been drawn away from the artistry of his visual imagery. It is true that Phare,<sup>1</sup> Gardner,<sup>2</sup> and Boyle<sup>3</sup> concern themselves at one time or another with Hopkins's imagery, but only the latter two deal with the structure of his imagery in ways which are pertinent to the themes of light and darkness. Boyle's exhaustive analysis, particularly, is superb. In the already massive accumulation of Hopkins criticism though, the remainder of the well-known works<sup>4</sup> pertain almost entirely to matters other than imagery.

Hopkins's visual imagery is basic to his greatness as a poet. Virtually all of the potent impact of Hopkins on poets, poetry, readers, and critics in the twentieth century stems from what I have chosen to call his "major" period (that is 1876-1889, poems numbered 28-75 in the third edition of his Poems). In the poetry of this "major" period, Hopkins's



imagery manifests itself in the continued and apparently deliberate use of images of darkness and light. Under close analysis, the importance of this fact becomes obvious. Oddly enough, despite his meticulously observant eye for the details and beauties of creation, Hopkins uses relatively few specific colours in his descriptions. References to light alone (or various forms and types of light) greatly outnumber all images of colour,<sup>5</sup> while light and dark together<sup>6</sup> place colour in a distinctly secondary category. Beneath the seemingly complex surface of Hopkins's verse, the imagery of light and darkness defines its designs and themes.

It is scarcely necessary to insist on the remarkable recurrence and versatility of light-dark imagery in literature. Such imagery appears as an important thematic device in the writings of poets like Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Blake, Shelley, and Eliot. It is dominant in major novels (like Moby Dick, Heart of Darkness, and Ulysses), and in traditional romance (like Morte d'Arthur) and myths, not to mention the Bible (particularly its apocalyptic literature). And it is particularly striking in religious poetry. By observing how Hopkins adapts this imagery to his own aesthetic and spiritual requirements, I believe it is possible to show why he may be regarded as one of the great religious poets in English literature.





Man can describe his physical experiences of light and darkness from a point of view which may be sensuous, psychological, or scientific, but his account may not necessarily be poetic, metaphysical, or even imagistic. As I proceed to discuss Hopkins's view of nature, with the particular intention of showing that he seeks to "reconcile" finite and infinite, it will become apparent that imagery and metaphor of light and darkness play significant roles in both his vision and in his merging of Creator and creation into a great theophany.

Initially the terms "light" and "dark" might appear to be the most strikingly simple and direct of antitheses. However, one must recognize in them a broader and more inclusive suggestion of the great multiplicity of contraries which are part of existence. That is, the categories of light and dark have certain qualities within them which allow for their adjectival or metaphoric application to other opposites. For example, one speaks of the "dark" days of conflict, or the "bright" hope of peace, or of the "day" of life and the "darkness" of death. These examples illustrate the fact that conflicting or antithetical elements of experience may be referred to in terms of light and dark. As the discussion develops, particularly in Chapter V, the importance of these categories of contraries to Hopkins's poetry will become





manifest.

Furthermore, understanding the relationship between such opposites as light and darkness will illuminate a theme which persistently recurs in Hopkins's verse, namely the reconciliation of contraries, the inherent positive in the negative, the ability to move unparalyzed within the tension of apparent paradoxes. Since a more exhaustive discussion of this problem will become the burden of the concluding chapter, my intent at this point is simply to indicate certain of these antithetical elements as a preparation for later examination. In Hopkins's verse, most of the paradoxes are religious in nature. An essential quality of the Christian faith is the maintenance of paradoxes, and Hopkins's poetry displays the influence of this quality. Some of the paradoxes which Hopkins, as a Christian, faces are: life in death, death in life, comfort in distress, beauty or serenity in terror, eternity in time, faith through doubt, blindness in sight, sight in blindness, God in man, and man as God.

As Hopkins views and presents nature in his poetry, it becomes obvious that he is not describing the world solely for the sake of its aesthetic beauty. Somehow, and from somewhere, the glory of God, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit flow out of his images. It is important, then, to begin with Hopkins's approach to



nature, to the finite, in his poetry in order to understand the potent impact of the grandeur of God and the Infinite which flashes from trees, stars, and hearts.

Hopkins is not, as one might too quickly conclude, a mystical Christian poet. The mystic, as has often been observed, is not particularly interested in persons or things, but rather believes the finite, actual world can be "used" in the name of beauty or God. Trying to achieve a tenuous, spiritual contact with the finite, the mystic poet touches it just sufficiently to produce his mystical vision. However, he does not lay hold of reality too solidly, since his vision might be impaired by the shocking actuality of things.

William F. Lynch, for example, argues that the mystic:

. . .takes the finite as a bag of tricks, or as a set of notes to be played lightly and delicately, in order to send the soul shooting up, one knows not how, into some kind of infinite or absolute; that accomplished, the devil take the finite.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the mystical view of nature, Hopkins neither reaches up or down to the natural order from which his symbols spring. His emphasis is continually upon the simultaneity of matter and spirit, the coexistence of the natural and the divine. For Hopkins, the world is charged with the grandeur of God, not because of a mystic experience, nor because his mind can suggest hypothetical analogies which point towards the workings of God; but rather because the





grace of God is immanent even in fallen nature. God's grace is available through symbols which participate in the reality they represent.

W.H. Gardner finds in "Scotism" not merely a source but the rationale for Hopkins's concern with the "concrete" and with the significant "relation between activity and substance":

Individuality . . . is the direction given to natural activities by the haecceitas [Scotus: "this-ness"]: it is the real relation between the creature and God. . . . Hopkins saw in Scotism a noble tribute to the dignity of man. It was natural that a poet as sensuous as Keats should agree with the philosopher who emphasized the greater importance of the concrete over the abstractions of the mind and who stressed the close relation between activity and substance; equally natural that an anthropophile as great as Wordsworth himself should share the Scotist conviction that humanity is too noble a thing to be a mere lump of clay acted upon by outside forces: . . . man must use his freedom of choice to perfect his individual nature "where it fails," to give the whole being its true direction Godwards:

"Doff darkness, homing nature knows the rest --".<sup>8</sup>

This, in essence, is the explanation Hopkins himself offers in remarks which Pick quotes from the poet's then unpublished manuscript, "Commentary on the Spiritual Exercises":

God's utterance of himself in himself is God the Word, outside himself is this world. This world then is word, expression, news of God. Therefore its end, its purpose, its purport, its meaning, is God, and its life or work to name and praise him.<sup>9</sup>

Hopkins, then, does not speak of nature in vague generalities. All his writings stand as evidence of his meticulous and painstaking observation of detailed particularity,





as he tried to capture the "this-ness" or inscape which is the formal cause of each thing in creation:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves -- goes itself; myself it speaks and spells;  
Crying What I do is me: for that I came. (Poems, No. 57<sup>10</sup>)

Not a mystic, but a sacramental poet, Hopkins does not avoid or short-change reality in the least. He does not use the finite as a spring-board into the glory of the Infinite. Strange as it may sound, for Hopkins, just as for William Blake, all time and all Eternity, the finite and the Infinite, exist NOW. Neither Blake's nor Hopkins's systems are escapist, or "I'm-but-a-stranger-here-Heaven-is-my-home." "Other-worldly" or "mystical" are appellations which could only be falsely applied to these poets. Blake says, "This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity."<sup>11</sup> Hopkins and Blake are not negating reality, nor do they seek to ignore or annihilate it. They instead give it a new meaning; namely, the finite and the Infinite are not only Now, they are ONE. By an arduous and often terrifying struggle, Hopkins passes through real contours of being and thereby arrives at knowledge and insight into the Infinite. William Lynch uses Christ as an example of this path of the imagination, which he calls "the Generative Finite":

Christ . . . whether we believe in Him or not, He represents an ideal point at which the imagination can relax the strain



of its double aspirations; if He is there, then at that point at least we can keep penetrating more and more deeply into the detail of Him, who is penetrating the detail of life as a way of life, and let the other side of the picture -- the dream, the divine, the unlimited, the beauty -- take care of itself.<sup>12</sup>

Gardner too argues that:

Both Aquinas and Scotus maintained, as Hopkins does . . . , that the supernatural order is not the antithesis of the natural order; rather it is the *τέλος*, the fulfillment of that order.<sup>13</sup>

Hopkins's poetic imagination reaches towards being -- the being of man, of things, of SELF, and through these to infinite

Being:

Neither do I deny that God is so deeply present to everything . . . that it would be impossible for him but for his infinity not to be identified with them or, from the other side, impossible but for his infinity so to be present to them. (VI, 316<sup>14</sup>)

Essentially, this is not only Aquinas, Scotus or Blake, but

St. Paul too:

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead. (Romans 1:20)

In Hopkins's poetry, this perception is common. The Real is not simply a Platonic mirror in which man may observe reflections of non-material, ideal realities. In Hopkins's verse, eternal reality is instead seen and experienced in time and space. Blake calls this perception "Divine Analogy." The similarity between Hopkins and Blake is again worth noting.

Blake says:





Sweet babe, in thy face  
 Holy image I can trace.  
 Sweet babe, once like thee,  
 Thy maker lay and wept for me.

. . . Infant smiles are his own smiles;  
 Heaven & Earth to peace beguiles.<sup>15</sup>

Now Hopkins says:

the just man . . .  
 Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is --  
 Christ -- for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
 Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
 To the Father through the features of men's faces. (No. 57)

The smiles of the child "are his own smiles." They are (not  
 are like) at the same time the child's temporal smiles and the  
 maker's eternal smiles. The just man is Christ, and the  
 eternal is realized through the man's earthly lineaments.

The immanence of God is not best seen in moments of  
 ethereal nothingness divorced from the stresses of reality.  
 Hopkins's heart rejoices rather in the perception of the In-  
 finite which one "gleans" from "the dearest freshness deep  
down things" (No. 31, my italics).

I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,  
 Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour;  
 And, eyes, heart, what looks, what lips yet gave you a  
 Rapturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder replies? (No. 38)

This gleaned harvest of God in the depths of things, in the  
 inscapes of creation, is exactly the "instress" of which the  
 poet speaks so often: "Since, tho' he is under the world's  
 splendour and wonder,/ His mystery must be instressed,





stressed" (No. 28:5, my italics).

What, then, is Hopkins's attitude toward, and experience of, temporal, physical, fleeting nature? Two poems will serve to summarize adequately the answer to this question, which, in fact, both of them ask. In the "Spring" sonnet (No. 33), after exuberantly pinpointing, in the octet, the rushing richness and delight of nature's re-creation, the poet begins the sestet with the rhetorical question which implies that the sheer animal, sensual, aesthetic pleasure of the spring-time moment is not in itself the ultimate truth:

What is all this juice and all this joy?

A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning  
In Eden garden.

However, he does not go on to say, as would the mystic, "All this beauty is very fine, BUT it should only serve to point your gaze skyward -- to Christ." Hopkins instead strenuously insists on laying hold of this earthly beauty -- with all his might -- in order to "Have, get . . . Christ, Lord" (No. 33). Probably nowhere does he state the fact of this perception more simply or more forthrightly than in an entry in his journals for May, 1870:

I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it. (IV. 199)

"What is all this juice and all this joy?" The same question is asked again in "To what serves Mortal Beauty?":



"What do then? how meet beauty? Merely meet it; own,/ Home at heart, heaven's sweet gift; then leave, let that alone" (No. 61). Through and in this mortal beauty which is owned and loved in depth, one can expect to meet "God's better beauty, grace" (No. 61). As C. C. Abbott asserts, Hopkins "can best reveal to us the loveliness of God's kingdom on earth, the beauty of those made in His image, and the pains of mortality" (I, xlii).

With this view of Hopkins's sacramental, theophanic experience of the physical world, we can proceed to a more detailed analysis of his imagery of nature. The ensuing chapters will be devoted to the meanings, inscapes, and in-stresses of light in its various forms as it appears in his poetry, to the significance of the imagery of darkness, and, finally, to a discussion of the dichotomy of existence which is metaphorically suggested by the light-dark themes.

The science of physics would have us understand that the majority of the objects in the physical world are made visible by means of reflected light. But, as the renowned Danish physicist Niels Bohr argued, visible light which is not reflected emanates from some thing whose molecular structure is being excited by an outside source of energy (heat, electricity, nuclear fission, or the like). These "excited" molecules give off "photons," units of radiant





energy, some of which are visible to the naked eye as light.<sup>16</sup>

If one may speak in terms parallel to the physicist, the mystic's concern with the original Source of Light (be that source Truth, Beauty, God, or whatever) allows him to see the physical world only as a reflector. Things are merely important in so far as they are a second-hand means of experiencing the Ultimate. A uniqueness of Hopkins's light-imagery though, is that light is seldom reflected. His poetry does not contain light which bathes objects, but rather light which shines through and out of things. This view makes the things themselves of vital significance since they become the "excited molecules" emitting "photons." They are then the source of light. The energy which activates these molecules is always God; therefore their light is, in fact, both God's light and their own. Hopkins's verse provides numerous examples of light "deep down" things:

Stars, . . . Starlight, wafting him out of it. (No. 28:5, my italics)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil. (No. 31, my italics)

Look at the stars! . . . the fire-folk, . . . the elves'-eyes,  
. . . quickgold, . . . airy abeles set on a flare!

These are indeed the barn; withindoors house

The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse

Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows.

(No. 32, my italics)

In "As kingfishers catch fire" (No. 57), the idea of the flame





and spark of self comes from "indoors each one," and Christ plays "to the Father through the features of men's faces" (my italics). The Virgin Mary also functions in a similar manner:

Through her we may see him  
 Made sweeter, not made dim,  
 And her hand leaves his light  
Sifted to suit our sight. (No. 60, ll. 110-113,  
 my italics)

In general, every one of Hopkins's most frequently recurring light images is an unreflected source of light in itself: fire, stars, lightning, glory, glowing, sun, electricity, and diamonds (light shines through, not onto, diamonds).

From the depths of the inscapes of these lights radiate an enormous number of instresses. Each light symbol may, in different poems, be interpreted on a variety of different levels. I have chosen to classify arbitrarily the "lights" in Hopkins's major poems into three groups; Natural Light, Fire (I realize that "fire" is technically a natural light, but since it is the poet's favorite and most meaningful single light-image, it should be discussed separately), and Supernatural Light.<sup>17</sup>



Hopkins delights in observing the play and sparkle

Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!  
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!  
The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!  
Down in dim woods the diamond delves! the elves'-eyes!  
The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!  
Wind-beat whitebeam! airy abeles set on a flare!  
Flake-doves sent floating forth at a farmyard scare! (No. 32)

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon; (No. 36)

elm arches  
Shivelight and shadow tackle in long lashes lace, lance,  
and pair. (No. 72)





. . . May,  
 Why fasten that upon her,  
 With feasting in her honour?  
 Is it only its being brighter  
 Than the most are must delight her?

Natural light, such as lightning or sun, even when used on a strictly literal level, can also accentuate moments of death or danger. It can give immediacy and blinding intensity to crucial or disastrous incidents, such as occur in the two shipwreck poems, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (No. 28), and "The Loss of the Eurydice" (No. 41):

Time's tasking, it is fathers that asking for ease  
 Of the sodden-with-its-sorrowing heart,  
 Not danger, electrical horror. (No. 28:27)

And you were a liar, O blue March day.  
 Bright sun lanced fire in the heavenly bay;  
 But what black Boreas wrecked her? he  
 Came equipped, deadly-electric,

A beetling baldbright cloud thorough England  
 Riding: there did storms not mingle? (No. 41)

A quotation from Hopkins's journals evidences his observations of lightning and indicates a plausible source for much of the imagery found in the poems:

Thunderstorm in the evening, first booming in gong-sounds, as at Aosta, as if high up and so not reechoed from the hills; the lightning very slender and nimble and as if playing very near, but after supper it was so bright and terrible some people said they had never seen its like. People were killed, but in other parts of the country it was more violent than with us. Flashes lacing two clouds above or the cloud and the earth started upon the eyes in live veins of rincing or riddling liquid white, inched and jagged as if it were the shivering of a bright riband string which had once been kept bound round a blade and danced back into its pleatings. Several



strong thrills of light followed the flash but a grey smother of darkness blotted the eyes if they had seen the fork, also dull furry thickened scapes of it were left in them. (IV, 233-34)

We notice how the lightning, at first a delightful and playful phenomenon, later changes in character to become "bright," "terrible," and destructive. In "God's Grandeur" (No. 31), similarly, the flame which is, and should be, lovely and revealing of greatness and beauty becomes, through abuse, searing and killing.

Man, or man's spirit, can be represented metaphorically by stars or small fires:

Sometimes a lantern moves along the night,  
That interests our eyes. . . .  
Men go by me whom either beauty bright  
In mould or mind or what not else makes rare. (No. 34)

Million-fueled, nature's bonfire burns on  
But quench her bonniest, dearest to her, her clearest-selved  
spark  
Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind, is gone!  
. . . Manshape, that shone  
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out. (No. 72)

However, the lights of beauty, crisis, or man are but minor uses to which Hopkins puts nature's manifold sparks and flashes. The play of light in wings, leaves, and sky engenders more than merely the pantheistic rapture of a Wordsworth. For Hopkins the believer, the imagery -- as does nature herself -- must become a means of glorifying and experiencing God. As he himself writes:





The sun and the stars shining glorify God. They stand where he placed them, they move where **he bid them**. "The heavens declare the glory of God." (V, 239)

This is the purpose of the world, the end of our being: when we have once said from our hearts / Glory be to God /. (V, 28)

He recognizes in creation the One who spoke through the prophet Isaiah:

I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: . . .

I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil:

I the Lord do all these things. (Isaiah 45:5, 7)

With the exception of the few examples cited above, whenever Hopkins speaks of natural light phenomena (such as lightning, stars, sun, and daylight) they become direct metaphors or symbols of some person of the Trinity, or of God's action in the lives and hearts of men.

Light seems to be a natural symbol for deity. Sun-worship was certainly one of the living faiths of ancient cultures. To the naïve observer, the light of the sun is both the cause of life on earth and at the same time the medium by which one becomes aware of his surroundings. C. H.

Dodd remarks:

By using the symbol of light it was possible to give an account of the relation of the absolute to phenomena, of God to the universe. Light communicates itself by radiations, which are emanations (so it was supposed) of its own substance. Thus God is the light by whose diffused radiations we apprehend the phenomenal world.<sup>1</sup>

In the Gospel of John though, Dodd continues:





. . . the doctrine of the archetypal light becoming immanent in the world and in man is not the substance of his Gospel. The determining fact of the Gospel, to speak in these terms, is that the archetypal light was manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. He is ~~the~~ Light in which we see light; that is, he is . . . reality revealed, as he is also *ζωή* ["life"]. He mediates to man that knowledge of God which is eternal life. Thus when John speaks of the light coming into the world (iii. 19, xii. 46) he is always thinking of the appearance of Jesus Christ in History.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus claimed to be "the light of the world" (John 8:12).

God the Father is symbolized in the Old Testament as the source of light (As in the quotation: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" Genesis 1:3), as in the **pre-****sence** of God ~~in the~~ burning bush or ~~the~~ pillar of fire (Exodus 3:1-6, 13:21-22), or as the sun (Psalm 84:11). And, likewise, those men who have experienced new life in this light are spoken of as "children of light" (Ephesians 5:8), "flames of fire" (Hebrews 1:7), wearing the "armour of light" (Romans 13:12). In view of the emphasis and concern with light among Christians, the import of Hopkins's imagery is at once apparent. However, he uses it with such power and originality that old concepts are re-sharpened, and given new vigour.

There are many types of light evident in the natural universe, each the vehicle of a multitude of connotations. In the same way, Hopkins's "lights" are numerous and varied to suit the actions or Person of the Trinity symbolized or uttered by them.



One of the poet's favourite images in his early major period (especially in "The Wreck of the Deutschland") is lightning, or the electrical contact between God and creation.<sup>3</sup> The quotation from his journals, cited on page 15, above, implies the paradoxical nature of lightning and the God it often represents. In the second stanza of "The Wreck of the Deutschland," the poet speaks to his "mastering" God:

I did say yes  
O at lightning and lashed rod;  
Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess  
Thy terror, O Christ, O God. (No. 28:2)

There is no doubt that the lightning of nature is glorious, because the "glow, glory in thunder" (No. 28:5) utters Christ. "But part of the force of [this] image comes from the pressure of the lightning's suppressed qualities of danger."<sup>4</sup> Stanza two links lightning with God's rod of discipline, and this rod, even though it is full of glory, can be fearful and death-dealing. The poet and the nuns submit to this "electrical horror" (No. 28:27) because they can also declare, "Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm" (No. 28:9 my italics). Is this lightning coupled with love really as paradoxical as it seems? Can there be such a thing as a loving lightning? The three previous stanzas, numbers six, seven, and eight, help to clarify the relation between God's two faces of justice and love. The stress of







faith does not spring "out of his bliss" (No. 28:6), but it is delivered first out of "stars and storms." The heart of man must be put "hard at bay" (No. 28:7) and must know the terror and aloneness, at first hand, which Christ knew during his Passion and Suffering. For it is out of this painful moment in the Christ-event that the "lightning-stress"<sup>5</sup> of revelation is discharged with a gush into man's life. Man is "beyond saying sweet" (No. 28:9), and therefore the lightning of God is a necessary manifestation of his seeking and melting love. Later, in stanza twenty-seven, the poet goes on to say that it is "not danger, electrical horror" which turns the heart toward God, but instead the sudden "appealing of the Passion" which crisis brings home.

There is another light image from nature which stands second only to "fire" in Hopkins's favour -- that is "starlight."

As we drove home the stars came out thick: I leant back to look at them and my heart opening more than usual praised our Lord to and in whom all that beauty comes home. (IV, 204-05)

Without exception, each time he employs "stars" they are associated with God. Take three simple examples:

"The sun and stars shining glorify God" (V, 239).

I kiss my hand  
To the stars, lovely-asunder  
Starlight, wafting him out of it. (No. 28:5)

"But thou art above, thou Orion of light" (No. 28:21).



The stars and constellations proclaim God's presence, glory, and beauty. In an even more inclusive image, in "The Starlight Night" (No. 32), "Hopkins sees the glorious stars as the outer wall of Christ's barn"<sup>6</sup> which enfolds the harvest -- his Elect, as light-farm-harvest are fused in a complex pattern of the sort we find in St. John's Revelation. "The Bugler's First Communion" (No. 47) contains a passage which also recalls similar celestial imagery. Here, the poet calls upon the bugle-boy's "angel-warder" to watch over him and to "dress his days to a dexterous and starlight order." This figure connotes both the shining role of knighthood and the ultimate heavenly order of a chevalier of Christ. Starlight, in Hopkins's scheme, ranges in this way from the image of God's ultimate harvest to the hosts of His heaven, from His realm seen in pastoral terms (a fiery harvest) to His realm as a kingdom of light.

Because of the unique place and function of the Blessed Virgin (" . . . compared to the Air we Breathe" No. 60), the starry glory of God and the "daystar" (l. 106) -- Christ -- is made all the more magnificent and apprehensible to man:

Whereas did air not make  
This bath of blue and slake  
His fire, the sun would shake,  
A blear and blinding ball  
With blackness bound, and all  
The thick stars round him roll  
Flashing like flecks of coal,





Quartz-fret, or sparks of salt,  
In grimy vasty vault. (No. 60, ll. 94-102)

Finally, in the rending, existential, black-white dichotomy of "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (No. 62), the stars lose their previously implied dapple and sparkling beauty. They become instead part of the "two folds -- black, white" between which the poet is hung and torn. Evening's:

. . . earliest stars, earl-stars, stars principal, overbend us,  
Fire-featuring heaven. For earth her being has unbound, her  
Dapple is at an end, as-  
tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; self in self steeped  
and pashed -- quite  
Disremembering, dismembering all now. (No. 62)

Harking back to "The Blessed Virgin" and also to Hopkins's meditation, "the sun and the stars shining glorify God" (V, 239), another heavenly body and natural light comes into focus. There is, for example, more to the relationship of "son" and "sun" in his poetry than a clever homonym. The symbolism of the sun, linked with the events of sunrise, dawn, and daylight, forms another vital block of major importance in Hopkins's light imagery.

Like a jewel the vault of heaven is set above us; the sight of it is glory made visible. Plain to our view is the sun's passage as it shines out, a very masterpiece of his workmanship, who is the most High. How it burns up the earth at noon-day! How fierce its glow, beyond all endurance! Tend thou the furnace, heat is thy daily portion; yet three times hotter the sun, as it burns up the hillside, scorching all with its fiery breath, blinding men's eyes with its glare. Swiftly it speeds on its course, to do the bidding of the Lord, its glorious maker. (Ecclesiasticus 43:1-5)





In only one of his major poems, "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" (No. 59), does the sun have a non-theological significance. The leaden echo asks the desperate question: "How to keep . . . back beauty . . . from vanishing away?" It finally concludes hopelessly that all beauty will fade and decay -- no matter what. The golden echo, however, answers quite to the opposite, and while doing so makes of the sun a symbol of the change, decay, and flux which inevitably burns and kills all things whose beauty is natural:

Spare!

There is one, yes I have one (Hush there!);  
Only not within seeing of the sun,  
Not within the singeing of the strong sun,  
Tall sun's tingeing, or treacherous the tainting of the earth's  
air. (No. 59)

It is only one step further to make of the sun a hell image, as Hopkins does in "Pilate" (No. 76) (if I may, for the sake of illustration, go beyond his "major" poetry). This description of Pilate's private hell uniquely removes all suggestion of light and life from the sun figure, as it concentrates on the torments it can inflict:

The sun whose vast afflictive heat  
Does lay men low with one blade's sudden blow  
Cleaves not my brain, burns not my feet,  
When the fierce skies are blue to black albeit  
The shearing rays contract me with their blaze  
Most dead-alive upon those days. (No. 76)

The most natural way of regarding the sun, for the Christian, is in terms of God and Jesus Christ. Poem number



sixty, "The Blessed Virgin," was written in 1883, but its theme and substance were anticipated four years earlier in one of Hopkins's Bedford Leigh sermons:

St. Bernard's saying, All grace given through Mary: this is a mystery. Like blue sky, which for all its richness of colour does not stain the sunlight, though smoke and red clouds do, so God's graces come to us unchanged but all through her. Moreover she gladdens the Catholic's heaven and when she is brightest so is the sun her son: he that sees no blue heaven sees no sun either, so with Protestants. (V, 29)

Echoes of this sermon are unmistakable in the "Virgin" poem, and throughout it the sun is the Son:

Yet such a sapphire-shot,  
Charged, steeped sky will not  
Stain light. (ll. 79-81)

. . . This blue heaven  
The seven or seven times seven  
Hued sunbeam will transmit  
Perfect, not alter it. (ll. 86-89)

Whereas did air not make  
This bath of blue and slake  
His fire, the sun would shake,  
A blear and blinding ball  
With blackness bound. (ll. 94-98)

The poet asks the blue sky -- Mary -- to:

. . . make our daystar  
Much dearer to mankind;  
Whose glory bare would blind  
Or less would win man's mind.  
Through her we may see him  
Made sweeter, not made dim,  
And her hand leaves his light  
Sifted to suit our sight. (ll. 106-113)

The "light" and the "sun" (Son) are Christ, whose radiance shines through Mary undiminished, but more "comprehensible --







sweetly attuneable to the limited human heart."<sup>7</sup>

Because the entire structure of the Mary poem is based on a literary device not unlike a metaphysical conceit -- strenuously and almost self-consciously applied to the subject -- the sun becomes a mere simile for Christ. The potency of the symbolic metaphor of the sun-Christ, as used in stanza thirty-five of "The Deutschland" for example, where the symbol both represents and is the reality it expresses, is considerably diminished in "The Blessed Virgin." Compare the lines just quoted (ll. 106-113) from "The Blessed Virgin" to the following cry from "The Deutschland." As Dr. E.J. Rose puts it, "A simile is only a looking-glass, but metaphor is the power by which you go through the looking-glass;"<sup>8</sup> thus:

Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us,  
 be a crimson-cresseted east,  
 More brightening her, rare-dear Britain, as his reign rolls,  
 Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest,  
 Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's  
 throng's Lord. (No. 28:35)

The metaphor in "The Deutschland" stanza is not only less conscious, but also more in tune with Hopkins's usual Scotist vision where the objects and phenomena of physical nature (the sun in this case) are important both for their theophanic function and for their own sakes. Such is not true of a simile where attention is clearly directed away from the



secondary subject and it becomes only important insofar as certain of its qualities illuminate the principal subject of the simile. The metaphor of the sun does not merely create connotations of Christ -- as does simile -- but it brings the connotations to life. In fact, in this example from "The Deutschland" (and it is true for all of Hopkins's metaphors) the sun-metaphor allows the natural to become capable of bearing a supernatural meaning, and gives the language freedom to range at will from the restrictions of literal speech.

As one might expect, the thought of sunshine and dawn implies the notion of newness, freshness, and strength. After the sleep and lethargy of night, morning traditionally brings with it new perspectives -- not least of which is the whole significance of Easter. This thought is coupled with the magnificent flight of the falcon in Hopkins's finest sonnet, "The Windhover" (No. 36):

I caught this morning, morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in  
his riding

Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! (No. 36, my italics)

From the allusion to power and newness in the sunrise moment, it is a natural progression to the dawn-symbolism of "God's Grandeur" (No. 31):

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;





And though the last lights off the black West went  
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs--  
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.  
 (No. 31, my italics)

The Holy Ghost "brooding" with "warm breast" and "bright wings" is a very effective and pointed image, partly because the "bright wings" does not seem to be of the same genre as "broods" and "warm breast." The latter two images connote warmth, shade, and dimness; but coupling them with the flashing of bright wings makes the union of the sun and the dove truer and more telling. The image might also be considered as a development of the simile used by Christ (the Son of God) in his lament over Jerusalem: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not" (Matthew 23:37). Through the morning sun and the dove, new life in God is engendered, and this life is lived in a vital creation which is "charged" with life and light.

Dawn and morning are also used as metaphors for spiritual illumination and insight. In poem No. 64, "Carrion Comfort," the morning is negatively invoked in so far as Hopkins paints no pictures of light, but instead refers simply to "that night, that year of now done darkness." Nonetheless, the dawn is unmistakably present. It is used with a new significance and in a context entirely different from its



context in "God's Grandeur." By the light of morning, the poet is enabled to see with whom he was fighting, and why:

All through the dreadful night of his spirit, Hopkins wrestled with a terrible beast Who turns out to be Christ when the light of morning dawns. It was Christ there, reaving peace so that through war, "my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear." And Hopkins finds that though he fought against Christ in the night, he also fought alongside of Him. The war was in Hopkins' heart, which was grinding against itself. Hopkins comes to know that he fought on both sides, but Christ on only one.<sup>9</sup>

While it is highly dangerous, no matter how convincing the evidence, to say that "I" in any poem is speaking autobiographically of the poet, Boyle has at least apprehended the significance of the dawn in the poem. Just as Jacob wrestled all night with the angel, so the poet has unknowingly fought Christ all through the darkness of the soul. But when the sunshine of insight and revelation breaks upon them, he is able to discover the inscape and have the instress of his opponent(s). Furthermore, the living, "lancing . . . blow-pipe flame" (No. 75), which is the "sire of [Hopkins's] muse," the male principle of poetry, cannot be disassociated from the fire of the Spirit of God. Therefore, Hopkins also grapples with his poetic art -- in addition to the concurrent struggle with God-Christ-self-reality.<sup>10</sup>

His seed shall endure forever,  
And his throne as the sun before me.  
It shall be established forever as the moon,  
And as a faithful witness in heaven. (Psalm  
89:36-37)







Having discussed a variety of specific natural expressions of light -- electric, celestial, and solar -- it remains to examine more fully the idea of ordinary "light" as used by Hopkins. Almost invariably, the noun "light" is employed in conjunction with the presence or grace of Christ -- who is, after all, the self-announced "light of the world." It is made incontrovertibly clear just how much Hopkins regarded Christ to be the light of the world by this extract from a sermon preached in 1879 at Bedford Leigh on the text from Romans 13:11-14:

So then the world is again [since the Ascension] dark without him, because Christ the light of the world is gone. The Catholic Church, which he set up, rehearses and tells over his teaching and shines by his light as the moon by the sun's. Otherwise it is dark: it is night and night is dark at best. And this night is not of so many hours, a number known beforehand; it is of quite uncertain length; and there is no dawn, no dayspring, to tell of the day coming, no morning twilight, the sunrise will be sudden, will be lightning we are told.

(V, 40)

The connection between this excerpt and the poem "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection" (No. 72) is immediately suggested. In this poem, the glory of the second coming of Christ is again symbolized in light, while the world is in darkness without him:

O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone  
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out; nor mark  
Is any of him at all so stark  
But vastness blurs and time beats level. Enough! the Resur-  
rection,  
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days, de-  
jection.



Across my foundering deck shone  
A beacon, an eternal beam. (No. 72)

Light also has other overtones than those of Christ's eschatological second coming. The poet often mourns the apparent absence of the light of God's grace and comfort in his day to day existence. In "I wake and feel the fell of dark" (No. 69) and "My own heart let me have more pity on" (No. 71), at the literal level the speaker grieves because night seems interminable, and his life seems as helpless as blind eyes seeking light (which, by the way, is a double helplessness, since even if blind eyes, on their own, could find light, they surely could not either see or know they had found it). However, the "light" he yearns for is more than just the pleasant relief of a sunny morning after a night of nightmares. He is, in actuality, crying out for the peace which the light of God's smile could restore to his spirit. The grace of God gives the heart both motive and strength to:

Doff darkness, . . .  
To its own fine function . . .  
Fall light as ten years long taught how to and why. (No. 51)

For the Christian, the summary and incarnation of God's grace, love, power, and sustenance is Jesus Christ; of whom Hopkins simply, yet profoundly, makes light the metaphor: "Thou Orion of light" (No. 28:21), and "Jesu, heart's light" (No. 28:30). Christ is the light of the world, the light of the heart, and the light of instress and faith.





### III

#### FIRE IMAGERY: "CATCH FIRE . . . DRAW FLAME"

Fire imagery and the symbolic force of fire are important in Hopkins's poetry. Being his single, favourite image, fire is found in fully one third of his poetic works. It is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail any but Hopkins's major works; therefore suffice it to say that in his early career as a poet, fire contains only rudimentary suggestions of things beyond itself. Fire is presented as being physically and cruelly destructive in "The Escorial" (No. 1), as an unambiguous visual image of natural beauty in "A Vision of the Mermaids" (No. 2) and "Winter with the Gulf Stream" (No. 3), and as connoting natural vitality, as in the flame of "Spring and Death" (No. 4).

By the time Hopkins begins writing "The Wreck of the Deutschland," however, his poetic facilities have matured and deepened. Broadly speaking, in his major period fire becomes symbolic of the human spirit, of the creative and life force of nature, and of the essence of Christ. The use of fire in "The Deutschland" foreshadows the later complexity of the symbol. Now, fire is a life force, a symbol of the



divine and of death, a force of spiritual regeneration, and a force exerted by the human soul in the world.

Gardner says of the first ten stanzas of "The Deutschland":

[They are] a meditation on God's infinite power and masterhood, on the direct mystical "stress" or intuitive knowledge by which man, the dependent finite creature, apprehends the majesty and terror, the beauty and love of his maker.<sup>1</sup>

In one of the most personal and sensual expressions of religious experience in English poetry, Hopkins says, in Stanza two of "The Deutschland," that his midriff is "laced with the fire of stress." The "fire" and the "stress" are united in an ambiguous relationship. The fire defines the stress, and the fire grows out of the stress. The fire and the stress are terrible and magnificent, descriptive of both the poet's vision and of his reaction to the vision which even burns in and through his vital organs.

The double nature of God is also recounted in terms of fire:

My heart . . . I can tell . . .

To flash from the flame to the flame then. (No. 28:3)

His heart recoils "from the flame," which is symbolic of God's mastery; yet is also attracted and drawn "to the flame" of the warmth of God's love and mercy.

Stanza ten begins:





With an anvil-ding  
 And with fire in him forge thy will  
 Or rather, rather then, stealing as Spring  
 Through him, melt him but master him still.

The "fire in him" in this stanza is again ambiguous. One reading might see in the three words a symbol for the life force of man which is derived from God. It is the fire which tempers and hardens man into a strong and sharp instrument of God's will. On the other hand, this fire may be the flame of the Spirit which convicts, converts, and melts the subject into a pliable usable form. Such was the experience of St.

Paul:

As I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell to the ground . . . and I said, What shall I do, Lord? (Acts 22:6, 7, 11)

The power of the symbolic fire happily excludes neither reading. In fact, the tone of the whole stanza is one that seems to say with Paul, "Master man in any way you see fit, Lord, but do master him."

Much later in the poem, stanza twenty-three, the fire becomes a part of the glorious presence of God which the five nuns of the "Deutschland" know and share after death. They are "sealed in wild waters / To bathe in his fall-gold mercies, to breathe in his all-fire glances" (No. 28:23).

Stanza thirty-four virtually glows with fire:



Now burn, new born to the world,  
 Double-natured name,  
 The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled  
 Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame,  
 Mid-numbered He in three of the thunder-throne!

Christ is double-natured, being both God and man, and he was conceived miraculously "in-Mary" of the Holy Ghost, "of-flame." The Holy Ghost is commonly associated with fire, and this passage is not unrelated to the burning tongues of flame which appeared to sanctify and inspire the Apostles at Pentecost. Therefore, "now burn, new born to the world" is an exhortation to the souls of the saved to show forth, as did the nun, the flame which is "Jesu, heart's light" (No. 28:30), and "our hearts' charity's hearth's fire" (No. 28:35).

Also just as there seems to be a paradox in "Thou are lightning and love,"<sup>2</sup> stanza thirty-five places strong emphasis on "hearts' charity's hearth's fire." Each adjective connotes some form of love. "Heart" is the seat of strong, personal love -- all love, in fact; "charity" is the love for humanity at large; and "hearth" symbolizes the love of a closely communal group -- usually the family. All these "loves" make of Christ an intensely loving fire, and a symbol of comfort, hope, salvation, and power.

In "God's Grandeur" (No. 31), the complexity of the fire-symbol is metaphorically heightened even further. The ambiguity is established through contrast. For example, "the





grandeur of God . . . will flame out" stands opposed to another sort of flame which makes the world "seared with trade." The burning or searing fire of the materialistic world threatens to dull and extinguish the brilliance of the "flame" in God's creation. Nevertheless, the flame of God's grandeur is as impossible to quench as is the flame of nature's vital principle (because it is inextricably part of the vitality of God). As living things, these fires are constantly causing the burned, seared universe to be re-created through the power of God and of life.

"The Starlight Night" (No. 32) and "Pied Beauty" (No. 37) have some minor fire imagery also. A relationship seems to be established, through fire, between nature and God. By experiencing the starry "fire-folk" (No. 32) and the flaring abeles of the same poem, Hopkins sees the hallowed dwelling place of Christ and the Elect. The stars, trees, and "fresh-firecoal chestnut-fells" (No. 37) shine forth the dazzling radiance of God's glory. Here Hopkins does not eulogize nature, but rather the theophany of nature (which is often a flaming theophany) and of the world.

There are two different fires in "The Loss of the Eurydice" (No. 41). One is a relatively straightforward natural fire, descriptive of a deceptively bright day. Stanza six begins; "And you were a liar, O blue March day./



Bright sun lanced fire in the heavenly bay." To suggest any further meanings in this passage would, I believe, unnecessarily strain the content and context. However, the last stanza of the poem is rather more ambiguous:

For souls sunk in seeming  
Fresh, till doomfire burn all,  
Prayer shall fetch pity eternal.

"Doomfire," in the above context, quite obviously suggests the traditional fires of hell, plus the accompanying eternal doom. The inclusion of such words as "souls," "burn," "prayer," and "eternal" gives the stanza a thoroughly eschatological tenor. Any catastrophic fire or disaster could be implied by doomfire alone, though, and it is the substance of the entire poem which gives validity to a "hell and judgment" interpretation.

Sonnets numbered forty-four and forty-five honour two men, Duns Scotus and Henry Purcell. In these works, fire takes on yet another significance. Scotus "fired France for Mary," and there was a "proud fire" in the soul of Purcell. Such fires are more than just driving-forces of vitality which propel any man unto greatness. These are the spiritual forces of man, with an emphasis on both the "spiritual" and the "man."

"Morning Midday and Evening Sacrifice" (No. 48) contains a marvelous picture of the wisdom of age:

The vault and scope and schooling  
And mastery in mind,





In silk-ash kept from cooling,  
And ripest under rind. (No. 48)

This suggestive image, if obscure, is explained by Hopkins in a letter to Canon Dixon:

I meant to compare grey hairs to the flakes of silky ash which may be seen round wood embers . . . and covering a core of heat.<sup>3</sup>

The symbol here is of the sustaining, yet temporary, strength of the human spirit. It is given greater weight in a succeeding sonnet, "The Candle Indoors" (No. 50):

Some candle clear burns somewhere I come by.  
I muse at how its being puts blissful back  
With yellowy moisture mild night's blear-all black,  
Or to-fro tender trambeams truckle at the eye.  
. . . Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire  
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault.

The fire of man's soul is fading in brightness when he is moving away from God, because it is the light by which man is supposed to approach God. The "fading fire" and the "vital candle" merge in the flame that is symbolic of the vision which is necessary for salvation.

The question from the sestet of this poem (No. 50) is marvelously ambiguous, suggesting further complexities in the candle-flame symbol: "Are you beam-blind?". On one level, the inference is scriptural:

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye,  
but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? (Luke 6:41)

Are you so blind that you are unable to see the beam or plank



in your own eye? Again, the "beam" in this line harks back to the candle's "tender trambeams." Thus, the question "Are you beam-blind?" is also asking if you are blind to the light of God and to the "candle indoors" your heart. Perhaps also you are beam-blind because your eye is evil and your candle has gone out. I am certain that the poem is also meant to recall Luke 11:34, 36:

When thine eye is evil, thy body is also full of darkness.  
 . . . If thy whole body be full of light, having no part dark,  
 the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining  
 of a candle doth give thee light.

Re-light the candle of God-life which is in your heart, take the plank from your eye, and take heed that your eye is not evil and blind to the beams of God's light.

Fire is most important in Hopkins when used as a symbol for the essence of Christ. It may not be apparent on first reading that the fire is Christ in "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame" (No. 57). However, the last three lines of the sestet suggest the possibility of this reading:

for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
 Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
 To the Father through the features of men's faces.

In and through the flashing fire and flame of creatures, through mortal beauty and the selved inscapes of nature, Hopkins, as has been demonstrated earlier, insists upon





perceiving the glory of God and the salvation of Christ. Therefore, when, by drawing light and fire, the kingfishers and dragonflies "come alive in three basic ways -- physically, biologically, and ontologically,"<sup>4</sup> they also focus attention upon the fire of Christ in them.

The Christ-symbolism of fire is more completely developed in the sonnet "The Windhover" (No. 36). Watching the falcon's perfect ecstasy of self-control and power, the poet is driven, although his heart is hiding from the light, to admire the glory of Christ the Lord as reflected in His small creature. The falcon becomes a model of Christ, revealing "in brute and analogous miniature the power and control of its Creator's divine nature, and symbolizes the knightly valor of its Creator's human nature."<sup>5</sup>

My heart in hiding  
 Stirred for a bird,--the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!  
 Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume here  
 Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
 Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

It remains ambiguous whether "AND the fire that breaks from thee" refers to "my heart" or to "my chevalier" (Christ).

McLuhan says:

Here . . . is the image of the fire in the hidden heart which evokes the "blue-bleak embers," and, which, as some have suggested, leads on to the image of the vermilion side of Christ on the cross.<sup>6</sup>

Certain parallel motifs in the sestet are also interesting in



this regard. Just as the "blue-bleak embers" fall, break, and shine; just as the soil breaks and shines under the plow (mortal clay transformed); and just as Christ descended, was broken ("gold-vermilion"), and shines glorified; so also the poet's heart is hidden, broken ("buckled"<sup>7</sup>), and caused to shine like the galled embers.

In addition, in Christ, all the symbolic fires merge into one:

the just man . . .  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is --  
Christ. (No. 57)

Therefore, whether the fire is God's, the poet's, or nature's, the same symbolism remains; fire signifies the force and beauty of both the crucified and resurrected Christ.

The climax of the symbolic system of fire-imagery comes in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection" (No. 72). Gardner explains the title: "According to Heraclitus (c. 535-c. 475 B.C.) all things are in a state of flux, being differentiations produced by strife (*πόλεμος*) of a single mobile principle -- fire."<sup>8</sup> In the poem, fire becomes the vital symbol for the sacrificed and risen Christ ("a beacon, an eternal beam"), the symbol for the natural life force that permeates the universe ("nature's bonfire"), and the symbol for the spiritual force of man ("nature's . . . clearest-selved spark Man").





Then, suddenly, "In a flash, at a trumpet crash, / I am all at once what Christ is" (No. 72), and the "world's wildfire" synthesizes Christ, nature, and man; all is united in Christ, the essence of fire. From the fire of Christ, nature and man have come; by the fire of Christ, nature and man move ever changingly; to the fire of Christ, nature and man are ordered to return. Christ, man, and nature, individual and inseparable, are caught in the terrible fire of Gerard Manley Hopkins.



#### IV

##### DARK IMAGERY: "THE BLEAR-ALL BLACK"

All is not fire, light, and rejoicing however. I propose, in this chapter, to look at some of the potentialities of "darkness" which Hopkins explores, and secondly to examine in more detail the significance of his dark imagery. There is, as well, a powerful use of visual opposites in Hopkins's poetry: light melting into darkness, light made brighter by contrast with darkness, light battling against darkness, light overcome by (and overcoming) darkness, and light and darkness as the only two realities of life.

From the sparkle of rain-rinsed clouds, God's glory in the lightning, and the endless fires of nature, Hopkins's eye eventually descends to the "manmarks" of the world.

Man's treatment of God's world is not an inspiring theme:

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod. (No. 31)

Those "aspens dear, whose airy cages . . . quelled or quenched  
in leaves the leaping sun," are

All felled, felled, are all felled; . . .

Not spared, not one

That dandled a sandalled

Shadow. (No. 43)





Delight in the dappled leaves is brought down like the trees with the despairing repetition of "felled," of "not spared, not one." So soon after it has risen with sunlit inspiration, the voice must drop and slow dejectedly:

O if we but knew what we do  
 When we delve or hew --  
 Hack and rack the growing green! (No. 43)

There is an unmistakable echo here of Christ's words on the cross, "They know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This implication deftly points both nature's sacramental purpose and man's blindly stupid destruction of the divine gift of nature. The last line balances the harsh crack of "hack and rack" against the euphonious flow of "growing green" -- a perfect alignment of sound with sense. Destruction of the natural order can only be destructive of the "ten thousand places" from whence Christ's light plays, and destructive of sight itself:

Since country is so tender  
 To touch, her being so slender,  
 That, like this sleek and seeing ball  
 But a prick will make no eye at all,  
 Where we, even where we mean  
     To mend her we end her,  
     When we hew or delve:  
 After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.  
 Ten or twelve, only ten or twelve  
 Strokes of havoc unselve  
     The sweet especial scene,  
 Rural scene, a rural scene,  
 Sweet especial rural scene. (No. 43)

The plaintive repetition echoes Hopkins's lonely sense of loss.



But the loss is more than personal; in felling the trees, man brings to earth forever that essence of God which expresses itself in the play of sun through leaves.

The poet's offense at the smell and smudge of man does not emanate solely from the fact that "after-comers" are denied the "beauty been." Offense derives from man's failure to observe the fundamental relationship which should exist between man and Creator. Appreciation should be rendered for the gift, the theophany of the world; the ultimate appreciation would be the return of the gift in its fresh original state:

deliver it, early now, long before  
death  
Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God,  
Beauty's self and beauty's giver. (No. 59, my italics)

The focus shifts to man. Isolated from the Force that fused the universe by his inability to recognize and celebrate that Force, man too undergoes the degeneration which he has imposed on the earth. Yet, while the poet may deplore man's "tainting of the earth's air" (No. 59), having turned to man, he must, inevitably, turn to himself:

Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire  
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:  
You there are master, do your own desire;  
What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault  
In a neighbour deft-handed? are you that liar  
And, cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt? (No. 50)

Has he spent his salt-of-the-earth savour? Is he so deft at





delving into neighbour's faults, that he becomes the hypocrite, ignoring the beam in his own eye? Is that vital flame dying which "puts blissful back . . . night's blear-all black"? With these questions, the poet hurls headlong from the delightful heights of celebration into the dark abyss of Self. The terrible words of his allusion, the Sermon on the Mount, become reality:

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness. (Matthew 6:23)

The pell-mell tumble of syllable on syllable is gone, and instead one hears the deadly tread of monosyllable:

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.  
What hours, O what black hours we have spent  
This night! What sights you, heart, saw; ways you went! (No. 69)

Personal communication with God has been lost; nor is it likely to be regained with "yet longer light's delay,"

. . . and my lament  
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent  
To dearest him that lives alas! away. (No. 69)

The voice receives no answer and cries, "Comforter, where, where is your comfort?" (No. 65). This too is a dead letter posted into darkness:

I cast for comfort I can no more get  
By groping round my comfortless, than blind  
Eyes in their dark can day. (No. 71)

Hanging unheard, unseeing, on the sheer cliffs of mind's mountains, he pitches "past pitch of grief" (No. 65) to



despair beneath, to the black awareness that death's end-all  
is all, and an almost desirable oblivion at that:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
 Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap  
 May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small  
 Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,  
 Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all  
 Life death does end and each day dies with sleep. (No. 65)

With the last line the barren monosyllables move by again  
 echoing dark not day.

The images darken and obscure the tone and texture:

"For earth her being has unbound, her dapple is at an end"  
 (No. 62). Shadows throng upon shadows and blot out both mem-  
 ory and identity:

as-  
 tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; self in self  
 steeped and pashed--quite  
 Disremembering, dismembering all now. (No. 62)

Man's night looms like a monstrous black wave of the sea:

"Our evening is over us; our night whelms, whelms, / and will  
 end us" (No. 62). Dragon-shaped branches etch themselves  
 against the metallic, impervious night:

Only the beak-leaved boughs dragonish damask the tool-  
 smooth bleak light; black  
 Ever so black on it. (No. 62)

For man, scanned by the "darksome devouring eye" (No. 64),  
 "beak-leaved boughs," bleakness, blackness, "hearse-of-all  
 night" (No. 62),





. . . all is in an enormous dark  
 Drowned. O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone  
 Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out; nor mark  
 Is any of him at all so stark  
 But vastness blurs and time beats level. (No. 72)

Is this then man's destiny -- to be extinguished in darkness,  
 a "grimy vasty vault" (No. 60)? The man of faith has a  
 brighter hope, of course, but it is not an easily-won, easily-  
 held vision. To appreciate Hopkins's light, it is necessary  
 to pass with him through the valley of the shadow, through  
 the dark terrors of the self and life without Christ.

Darkness is more difficult to deal with for both  
 poet and critic alike. Casually speaking, it is simply the  
 antithesis of light, nothing more than an opposite. All is  
 not so simple though. Where light is a positive, almost con-  
 crete thing; darkness is negative, a no-thing, an absence.  
 Light is energy and vitality; darkness has no energy or vital-  
 ity. Light moves, flashes, gives colour, reflects; darkness  
 is inert and makes all things like itself -- motionless,  
 black, and absorbent. It is this idea which Donne employs  
 in "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day": "I am re-begot / Of  
 absence, darkness, death: things which are not." Spiritu-  
 ally considered, darkness is the natural, fallen condition of  
 the world and of man. Light came into being by divine decree,  
 and as a symbol has always implied truth, well-being, blessed-  
 ness, "unfallen-ness." Darkness, however, has not been



blessed by this divine generation. Darkness is wherever light is not. Hence, night, blackness, and absence of light (except when thought of in terms of the comfort of sleep) inevitably connotes chaos, lostness, ignorance, and evil. Darkness is not alive, yet it is not dead; it does not move, yet it is always there if light should go out. Inexplicably omnipresent, and often sinister and terrifying, darkness is never truly driven away. The "blear-all black" forever awaits the extinguishing of life, light, faith, or hope, then floods the emptiness with its own emptier emptiness -- the archetypal void. In the Jubilate Agno, Christopher Smart speaks of darkness in this way:

For the SHADOW is of death, which is the Devil, who can make false and faint images of the works of Almighty God.

For every man beareth death about him ever since the transgression of Adam, but in perfect light there is no shadow.<sup>1</sup>

The experience of Gerard Hopkins was similar. In the totality of his forty-eight major poems, there are no more than a half-dozen references to shades of grey or shadow. His predominating expressions of non-light run almost entirely in the vein of night, dark, black, or blindness. Either he is standing in the shining sun of joy and celebration, or the light is gone altogether and his poems plunge into the abyss of utter night. Ultimately, in his most terrible sonnet, "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (No. 62), all the "sandalled"





shadows are gone and the poet's existence hangs on the black and white razor's edge of either-or. The shades and subtleties of life are gone and

Now her all in two flocks, two folds -- black, white; right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind  
But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each off the other. (No. 62)

Visual darkness occurs under one of two circumstances. The source of light is extinguished, or the organs of sight are somehow rendered incapable of apprehending the light. Literally speaking, the result of either phenomenon is the same -- the individual is plunged into blackness and forced to rely upon the other four senses to make the outside world real. It has been shown in previous chapters, however, that when Hopkins uses an image of light or dark, the literal meaning is surely not the significant meaning. If the literal result is the same, the symbolic interpretation of the image is vastly dependent upon whether the individual is blinded or the light is put out. Hopkins's darkness was never the mere simple-minded negation of light. His verse etches, paints, and proclaims nights of the soul, yearnings for illumination in black voids of doubt, dark pits of suffering -- times when man is driven to wonder whether his spiritual eyes have been blinded, or whether the light of God has actually gone out. Darkness breaks the circle of the senses by which man intuits God. He



is deprived, and thereby feels acutely his separation from God. Separation from God is hell, and it is not a positive condition, but a negative one. For Hopkins it is torment to fall out of the light of God's love.

Milton's blind Samson can establish the mood:

O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!  
Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,  
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!  
Light the prime work of God to me is extinct.<sup>2</sup>

Later he goes on:

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,  
Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse  
Without all hope of day!  
O first created Beam, and thou great Word,  
"Let there be light, and light was over all";  
Why am I thus bereav'd thy prime decree?  
The Sun to me is dark  
And silent as the Moon,  
When she deserts the night,  
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.<sup>3</sup>

In the blindness of despair, man is tempted to cry that "light the prime work of God to me is extinct." Or, as Hopkins expressed the anguish in "My own heart let me have more pity on" (No. 71):

I cast for comfort I can no more get  
By groping round my comfortless, than blind  
Eyes in their dark can day.

And in "I wake and feel the fell of dark" (No. 69):

. . . my lament  
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent  
To dearest him that lives alas! away. (my italics)

It is the torment of the blind man that perhaps light itself





is truly extinct, and the torment of the doubting man that perhaps God himself is truly absent or indifferent.

The ultimately determining factor, more important than even physical sight, is, then, the inward, imaginative, or spiritual perception. Whatever the man inwardly perceives to be true is true -- for him. If Samson were finally to decide that God's light was extinct, it would be extinct. Should Hopkins conclude that God indeed will remain "away," and that the quest for light were futile, he would obviously be forced to abandon his faith. In the second act of Hopkins's unfinished tragedy "St. Winefred's Well" (No. 105), Winefred's murderer, Caradoc, asks the crucial question:

We cannot live this life out; sometimes we must weary  
And in this darksome world what comfort can I find?  
Down this darksome world comfort where can I find  
When'ts light I quenched? (p. 156)

Man cannot find light within himself, blind eyes can do nothing but grope helplessly. Alone in his desperate longing, man's own "light" itself is nothing but darkness and extinction. What is needed is that seeming impossibility -- sight despite blindness, light despite darkness. Only after his eyes were put out was King Lear's Gloucester able to see clearly. Likewise, in "The Habit of Perfection" (No. 24) Hopkins commands:

Be shelled eyes, with double dark  
And find the uncreated light:



This ruck and reel which you remark  
 Coils, keeps, and teases simple sight. (No. 24, my  
*italics*)

It is man's obstinate determination to be totally self-sufficient, to rebel -- this is the original sin. Too proud to ask for aid, he would rather fumble in darkness and take his chances with death than, as the poet advises,

. . . let be; call off thoughts awhile  
 Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size  
 At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile  
 's not wrung, see you; unforeseen times rather -- as skies  
 Betweenpie mountains -- lights a lovely mile. (No. 71, my  
*italics*)

Light is energy; darkness is dead. Even a very small light, like the candle indoors, can overcome night with ease -- just by existing: "I muse at how its being puts blissful back / With yellowy moisture mild night's blear-all black" (No. 50, my *italics*). Hopkins asks only that man allow light's energy to pierce through the encompassing veil. If man actively refuses to see the light, he will not see it, and it will not be there. Likewise, rather than trying to move the dark mountains, he should instead passively permit the light's own vitality to smile between them.

The nun on the doomed "Deutschland" is lashed by rain, wind, and sea. "The rash smart slogging brine / Blinds her; but she that weather sees one thing, one" (No. 28:19, my *italics*). The night is dark, she is sea-blinded, yet she sees,





calls on, and trusts the light of God -- undismayed by the benighting tempest. Hopkins is assured that God's mercy and purpose are not only beyond and outside the black terror of catastrophe, but the light of his love can even permeate the evil moment itself:

For the lingerer with a love glides  
Lower than death and the dark.

(No. 28:33, my italics)

The mighty message the poet announces is that Christ himself was "passion-plunged" (No. 28:33).

Does the nun suffer? Is the poet violently buffeted and tortured by doubt, weakness, and evil? Yes; but when they instress the Passion of Christ, even the horror of this darkness is given saving perspective. If there ever were an event in which evil, innocent suffering, malice, and human pain reaches a climax, it is in the passion and crucifixion of Christ. From the human point of view, from that of freedom, it is the maximum of that freedom which men have abused, which is to fight against God himself. At the same time, however, the cross is God's sovereign act of redemption. This extraordinary evil, then, is that which God does not will and does not do, but at the same time he has such power over this evil ("the lingerer with a love glides / Lower than death and the dark.") that he is able to make it, if man so allows, even an instrument of comfort and salvation.



Jesu, . . .

What was the feast followed the night

Thou hadst glory of this nun? (No. 28:30.)

The suffering of soul and body aboard the "Deutschland" may have been beyond telling, but Christ had "glory of this nun," in the midst of torment, and was conceived again in her to his glory and her sanctification. What "feast" is the poet speaking of?

Feast of the one woman without stain

For so conceived, so to conceive thee is done;

But here was heart-throe, birth of a brain,  
Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright.

Well, she has thee for the pain, for the

Patience; but pity the rest of them! (No. 28:30-  
31, my italics)

"Pity the rest of them!" Why should those men who have not instressed Christ be pitied? The fallen world, the natural world of unredeemed man is described by Hopkins in imagery most appropriate to their condition -- that is darkness and night. The nature of the child of Adam is to crouch in the dark, hiding from the light; the uncreated world was dark; sins are Biblically described as "works of darkness" (Romans 13:12). In a sermon on this very passage from Romans, Hopkins said:

This life is night, it is night and not day; we are like sleepers in the nighttime, we are like men that walk in the dark. . . . The time then that is passing between Christ's first coming and his second is night and his second coming will be the day.

This life is night, it is a night, it is a dark time.





It is so because the truth of things is either dimly seen or not seen at all. The thoughts in men's hearts are dark, they are not seen, because this life is night . . . and all things are alike in the dark.

So then the world is again [after the Ascension] dark without him, because Christ the light of the world is gone.  
(V, 39-40)

When Christ's light withdraws or is lost from sight, man's black-bound condition becomes, in Hopkins's vision and experience, terrible almost beyond description.

For example, the ship, "The Deutschland," may be considered as a microcosm. Seen in the context of the sermon-excerpt quoted above, the unfortunate plight of the doomed ship and its passengers becomes representative of the fact that outside of Christ "this life is night, . . . we are like sleepers in the nighttime." It is true that the light of God and Christ is omnipotent, it is true that all nature is a theophany of light, and it is true that man has within him a spark or fire of life. But unless man is given grace to "have, get" the living light for himself, all other light is ultimately no better than darkness.

"The Deutschland's" condition becomes the condition of the world. She is bound in darkness, unable to see either the safe harbour or the peril. The darkness in which she sails becomes an active agent of destruction:

She drove in the dark to leeward,  
     . . . night drew her  
 Dead to the Kentish Knock. (No. 28:14, my italics)



At the mercy of the horror of storm and sea, "Hope had mourning on" (No. 28:15) -- hope is dressed in black to match the colour and mood of the night. Day comes, but Hopkins passes quickly over it in order to maintain the night-mood: "And frightful a nightfall folded rueful a day" (No. 28:15). As night descends again, no salvation is apparent: "[No] rescue, only rocket and lightship, shone, / And lives at last were washing away" (No. 28:15). Rockets and lightships are merely man-generated lights and, therefore, totally ineffectual.

The ship's passengers are caught in a plight which the poet describes elsewhere in his verse. The natural life man lives out between birth and death is bounded at one extremity by the helpless darkness of the womb (or the pre-creative chaos), it passes through the dark valley of unregenerate time, and is bounded at the final limit by the void of death; "Evening strains to be time's vast, womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all night" (No. 62). A similar evocation of darkness is found in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire" (No. 72) as the poet remarks on the fleeting impermanency of man's life and work. In the strictly natural state, all man's strivings and yearnings are hopeless and fraught with the potentiality of despair. Time and darkness move over him without looking back or remembering. The darkness of existence-without-God presses into every crevice of life --





and death -- because there is no light strong enough to endure in holding back its sheer, black, oppressive weight. To illustrate, in the following quotation the relative puniness of the words descriptive of man, "bonniest," "spark," "fire-dint," "mark on mind," and "shone sheer off," contrast with the forces of darkness allied against him, "unfathomable," "enormous," "drowned," "blots black out," and "vastness blurs":

Million-fueled, nature's bonfire burns on.  
But quench her bonniest, dearest to her, her clearest-selved  
spark  
Man, how fast his firedint, his mark on mind is gone!  
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark  
Drowned. O pity and indignation! Manshape that shone  
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out; nor mark  
Is any of him at all so stark  
But vastness blurs and time beats level. (No. 72)

Hopkins is often pressed into giving darkness a concreteness which will metaphorically carry the necessary emotional weight into the description of man's condition. The sensuous substance which the poet gives to otherwise abstract "darkness" makes the image more readily effective: "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day" (No. 69, my italics). He speaks, in "The Lantern out of Doors" (No. 34), of certain men, some of whom are particularly unique, "wading" through life's night. With their "rich," if not powerful, lantern-beams "they rain against our much-thick and marsh air" (No. 34). Just as in "Heraclitean Fire," however, eventually these men and their lanterns are extinguished and swallowed from



sight by the darkness. Then, despite all efforts to the contrary, they are gradually forgotten -- except by Christ, who alone remembers.

To return to the "Deutschland" framework, it is worthwhile noting a similarity in the image-choice between "The Deutschland" and "Heraclitean Fire." Both selections employ a ship in the dark to convey their meaning. (The latter probably has more universal relevance since it is less confined to a particular historical event.) It is possible to say of one poem as easily as of the other that "all is in an enormous dark drowned." However, it would be unfair to the poet to give the impression that he leaves man drowned in the dark without any hope whatsoever. In "Heraclitean Fire" (No. 72) he carries the ship-image into the enraptured excitement of the last eight lines:

Enough! the resur-  
rection,  
A heart's clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days, de-  
jection.

Across my foundering deck shone  
A beacon, an eternal beam.

A similar flash of revelation breaks across the deck of the foundering "Deutschland."

Christopher Devlin, editor of The Sermons and Devotional Writings, maintains that certain insights in "The Deutschland" are directly traceable to Hopkins's "colloquy" in





the meditation of the "Three Sins" wherein:

. . . the Son of God is presented bleeding on the cross, having come down from the radiance of eternity into the dark prison of material suffering to redeem his own. (V, 107, my italics)

The heroine of "The Deutschland" is the nun, who, from the black pit of danger and distress, from the midst of "the black-about air," calls out "'O Christ, Christ, come quickly'" (No. 28:24). The poet explains, in stanza 27, that the dark times ("time's tasking") cause the weakened heart to ask for an easier way. Not so with the nun, though, for she is the only one aboard who perceives "the who and the why" (No. 28:29). She casts herself upon Christ, not for a free and easy ride, but because "He was to cure the extremity where he had cast her" (No. 28:28). Her suffering did not miraculously disappear; instead it became Christ's suffering, and he had "glory of this nun" (No. 28:30). Her passion was Christ's passion -- and no greater answer to the "Why" of her plight could she ask for.

"The Wreck of the Deutschland" becomes, then, less a microcosm, which might mistakenly be interpreted allegorically, and more a powerfully dramatic re-enactment of God's redeeming intervention in history. "With fire in him forge thy will" (No. 28:10). One individual, the nun in this case, surrounded by the fury of destruction, and about to be



drowned by the meaningless, enormous dark, prophetically understands and proclaims, "To live in Christ is to be crucified in him." This answer may sound simple, but it is wholly irrational and logically inconceivable. It outlines a paradox which Christian man, and Hopkins particularly, must struggle with, experience, and instress. In the following lines, Shakespeare has expressed beautifully the Christian's view of the paradoxical role that great suffering plays in men's lives:

But whate'er I be,  
Nor I nor any man that but man is  
With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd  
With being nothing.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, "God creates everything out of nothing," as Kierkegaard put it, "and everything which God is to use he first reduces to nothing."<sup>5</sup> The burden of the concluding chapter which follows is an attempt to understand Hopkins's coming to terms with life's paradoxes, with the "two folds -- black, white; right, wrong" -- of life; that is, the dichotomy of existence.





## THE DICHOTOMY OF EXISTENCE: "THE BEAUTY OF TERROR"

Herbert Read sees "The Wreck of the Deutschland" as an expression of "contrition . . . and submission rather than of the love of God."<sup>1</sup> "This," he says, "is the beauty of terror, the 'terrible pathos' of the phrase in which Canon Dixon so perfectly defined Hopkins's quality."<sup>2</sup> There is an important implication of paradox in Read's "beauty of terror" which he does not develop and which seems to reveal a central concept, or at the very least a persistently recurring theme, of Hopkins's poetry: the reconciliation of opposites, the inherent positive in the negative, faith in doubt, God in earth, light in darkness. At this point, earlier discussion of light and dark imagery will become relevant to matters presently at hand. We have seen how important Hopkins's use of such imagery is to the total structure of his verse and vision. Now, because of the nature of light and dark as opposites, they define, as metaphors, a convenient and significant point of departure for an investigation of contraries and paradox in Hopkins's verse.

Before concentrating on elements in "The Deutschland"



and other of his major verse which point this central theme, I offer here a brief examination of its cruder expression in two of the short pieces from his "Early Poems," "Heaven-Haven" (No. 20) and "the Habit of Perfection" (No. 24). In the first of these, the haven of heaven is not expressed positively by what attractions it offers, but negatively in terms of the aspects of the physical world that it does not possess. A nun, taking the veil, says, "I have desired to go / Where springs not fail" (No. 20), with a double negative implying a positive; the springs of this world are not perfect, but failures. This absence of perfection is not found in heaven, where the springs are perfect; and so the line consists of two cancelling negatives. The whole poem is, in fact, a system of negatives building up to express the nun's conception of the haven of heaven. The main image of the poem, and its title, come from the culminating half-sentence where the spiritual harbour is seen as the silent and motionless opposite of the earthly harbour of the nun's consciousness. I quote the poem in full:

I have desired to go  
Where springs not fail,  
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail  
And a few lilies blow.

And I have asked to be  
Where no storms come,  
Where the green swell is in the havens dumb,  
And out of the swing of the sea. (No. 20)





The poem is both an expression of the soul's search for heavenly perfection and its desire for a heaven-on-earth. In this case, the nun is renouncing the swell and hail of life -- things for which Hopkins later found much reason to be grateful, the instress and touch of the physical world -- for the motionless calm of the cloister. As I say, this is a very bare and faintly Swinburnian example of Hopkins's habit of seeing opposites, and belies to an extent the philosophy of his maturer poetry, but the theme is there. "Heaven-Haven" implies the subjugation of self (and the senses) that is made plainer in the second of the two pieces, "The Habit of Perfection" (No. 24).

Here Hopkins starts off with a negative and a paradox: "Elected Silence, sing to me" (No. 24). Perfection is in the sound of silence, an imposed and willing silence. Hopkins craves movement, but it must be stifled before the soul can reach the higher being:

Shape nothing, lips; be lovely-dumb:  
It is the shut, the curfew sent  
From there where all surrenders come  
Which only makes you eloquent. (No. 24)

Here are the opposites, the essential paradox of Hopkins's religious belief as seen in his "Early Poems"; it is also a conventional Christian paradox.<sup>3</sup> Subjugation of self brings elevation of self. Silence brings eloquence. This paradox



can be extended even into the discipline of poetry with the plodding labour at the perfection of technique flowering into the perfect expression of thought and emotion, or into the ultimate silence of the meaning that is not there -- that which is said is what is not said.

This stanza begins "Shape nothing, lips," and contains five negative ideas making up the opposite positive: "nothing," "dumb," "shut," "curfew," "surrenders," become "eloquence." It could be Hopkins's subconscious realization of the necessity for self-discipline that leads him to employ so many images of this kind; or it could be the echoes in his mind of the Roman Catholic prayer book, the habit of submission in divine service -- but these reasons can only be read into the poetry at this stage. Later in this chapter they are more easily justified.

Scriptural references are apparent, of course, in both of these early poems; the lilies in "Heaven-Haven" and the use of the "Consider the lilies of the field" passage, and the Biblical echoes of "marriage feast" and "bride" are noticeable:

And, Poverty, be thou the bride  
 And now the marriage feast begun,  
 And lily-coloured clothes provide  
 Your spouse not laboured-at nor spun. (No. 24)

(The last line is a good example of the sort of word-play for





which Hopkins has been criticized, but the source is obvious:

"They toil not, neither do they spin" Matthew 6:28).

Hopkins's verse, especially the more terrible of the sonnets, raises these questions again and again: "Can life's paradoxes be reconciled? How do I meet paradox without losing faith? What does the Christian do when suddenly, despite his faith, life becomes absurd and capricious, and God seems absent?" It becomes impossible to resolve the paradoxes since both aspects of the dilemma are very real and neither aspect can be blinked at or shut away. To deny the light of God's universal love and providence, for example, for the sake of making the darkness of hatred and suffering understandable would be, for Hopkins and the Christian, both rash and dishonest. Yet somehow the "two flocks, two folds -- black, white" (No. 62) -- ought to be incorporated into man's perception or, in the Christian view, he may be driven into rebellion, cynicism, or apostasy. To investigate encounters with the dark-light dichotomy of life in Hopkins's poetry, the discussion will cut across the implications of three selected poems; "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (No. 28), "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (No. 62), and "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection" (No. 72). In them I shall attempt to discover how the poet faces trials and crises, his changes in attitude, and his success



in incorporating paradoxes in a unified world vision.

Before I move on to "The Wreck of the Deutschland," a further examination of the presence of so many negatives will not be out of place. It is easily seen as a relic taken over unconsciously by the poet from his reading of Keats, Tennyson, and Swinburne. It is a strange instance of the Romantic dream-poetry, and recalls the use in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" of the central negative image, "And no birds sing." The use of such a negative image obliges the sensitive reader to hear and see, then dismiss, the singing birds. Hopkins uses the device (if indeed it is a device; it may well be intuition) to great effect, since, as I have shown, it reflects the important Christian idea of self-subjugation.

Subjugation, however, is more subtly conceived in "The Deutschland," where the negative quality stressed in the early poems assumes a deeper meaning, and the will to surrender to the power and love of the Creator becomes an altogether less negative thing. This poem, which Hopkins considered one of his best, stands as a monument to many aspects of the poet's religious, as well as his poetical, faith. Most impressive, although most superficial, is its vigour. George Herbert has returned in the nineteenth century; devotion, peace, and serenity are achieved after stormy doubt and violent mental and physical action. The theme of the poem is Mastery.





Mastery of the self through intense realization and use of the self makes way for the mastery of God over the physical being and the soul, the mastery of the "Lord of living and dead" (No. 28:1).

That the world is not evil, but the creation of God, is stated at the beginning. God is in earth, in "World's strand, sway of the sea;" and He gave life and the world in which to live that life: "God! giver of breath and bread" (No. 28:1). But Hopkins's faith vacillated with the tides. Those who have worked hard to achieve anything -- whether faith in God or human nature -- find the faintest shadows of doubt more intolerable than do those who have achieved no faith at all.

In "Carrion Comfort" (No. 64), the poet writhes in the throes of that despair. He is not playing games. The alliterating R sounds of "terrible," "rude," "wring-world," "rock," "darksome devouring," writhe tortuously, and the E sounds of the last line of the octet literally scream: "O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee." From the comfortless darkness of spiritual torment he hurls heavenward the question, "Why?":

O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me  
 Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lionlimb against me?  
 scan  
 With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones? and fan,  
 O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid  
 thee and flee?



When the darkness is finally "done," though, he sees he has all the while been struggling with God. Why did God allow such suffering? It was not punishment, nor was it cruel whimsy, but a loving attempt to cleanse the speaker's spirit: "That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear." In this fiery harvest of the soul, Hopkins gains an insight into life's dichotomy. He had been wrestling both himself and his Lord.<sup>4</sup>

When Hopkins doubts, it is "what with dread" (No. 28:1), but his faith tells him that his very doubt is "thy doing" (No. 28:1), sent from God -- as was the shipwreck he will be commemorating and the despair of "Carrion Comfort." But just as doubt is dreadful in the full sense, so the freshness of renewal of the realization of God's glory and concern for men is conveyed in this first stanza with a sensuous apprehension like a breath of cool air: ". . . and dost thou touch me afresh?/ Over again I feel thy finger and find thee" (No. 28:1). Likewise in "Carrion Comfort":

I kissed the rod,  
Hand rather, my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would  
laugh, cheer. (No. 64).

This textural verse, with the emphasis on the physical effect of the presence of God on the self, makes a direct and tactile impression on the reader. This is much of what Hopkins's poetry is about; the communication of the sheer





physical impression of living, thinking, and of worshipping.<sup>5</sup>  
 The ways of a Jesuit environment had impinged on Hopkins to a great extent, and there is a whispering atmosphere of consultation with superior priests in "I did say yes / O at lightning and lashed rod" (No. 28:2). This is certainly the note of contrition that Herbert Read speaks of; and it leads on to the full implications of his phrase "the beauty of terror" which I think so accurately pinpoints one aspect of Hopkins's religious experience.

Nowhere else in his poetry, indeed in any poetry that I can think of, is the sheer physical effort of prayer and worship so palpably expressed as in this second stanza of "The Deutschland." There is first of all an impression of kneeling in church or room, with consciousness during prayer of the physical surroundings:

Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:  
 The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee  
     trod  
 Hard down with a horror of height:  
 And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of  
     stress.

The upsurge in the stomach is like that sick feeling one experiences from the top of a high building. This is the personal, the self of Hopkins's religion: the horror of height.

Just as the inward physical surge is strong in Hopkins, his out-going effort is also vigorous. In order to



penetrate inside creation he needs, not a Keatsian, negative capability, but an almost electric stress of body and soul.

In the "Comments on the Spiritual Exercises" against the phrase Contemplatio ob obtinendum amorem ("Contemplation for obtaining love") is the following entry:

All things therefore are charged with love, are charged with God and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him. (V, 195)

This is felt not only in the "charged" world of "God's Grandeur" (No. 31), but also in the famous stanza from "The Deutschland," beginning:

I kiss my hand  
To the stars, lovely-asunder  
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and  
Glow, glory in thunder. (No. 28:5)

God is everywhere, in starlight and thunder. Subjugation of self is necessary to attain perfection, but this by no means implies that man's religion is a negative thing, the foregoing of the joys of the world. God's glory is both before us and after us, in the womb and in the tomb; and our task is to try to know and feel him in the space between. He is around us, but it is our duty to develop the capacity to penetrate physical reality to find his spiritual reality in it. In "The Windhover," Boyle says, "Hopkins pictures his own heart, hiding from the light, but yet admiring the glory of Christ the Lord and Master as reflected in this small creature of





his."<sup>6</sup> "Since, tho' he is under the world's splendour and wonder, / His mystery must be instressed, stressed" (No. 28:5).

Beyond sensual realization, which is what Hopkins means by this use of "instressed," is knowledge. There are the two ideas, not in opposition if one is used as a stepping-stone to the other, of sense and understanding: "For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when I understand" (No. 28:5). Hopkins is emphasizing throughout his poetry that it is through the God incarnate in the physical world that we come to understanding and the "Heaven-haven." Gardner says:

The soul must protest against its exile from heaven; but the man of faith does not lose his head. He may release a head of emotional steam, but as a result the human 'machine' (as Wordsworth called it) attains a more even stroke -- a poise of emotion and intellect which enables it to expend itself in productive action.<sup>7</sup>

After all, God himself inhabited the world, in Christ; and Christ's suffering is the example Hopkins uses in stanzas six and seven to explain the necessity of suffering and diverse experience, and the truth that heaven is to be gained through living. "Not out of his bliss / Springs the stress felt" (No. 28:6), but out of "The dense and driven Passion, and frightful sweat" (No. 28:7). Christ lay in a human body, in "womb-life grey" (No. 28:7), and was a physical hero, ("Hero of Calvary," No. 28:8) to whose physical presence men go, to "Christ's feet" (No. 28:8). Hopkins often makes this



point of his love for Christ as a man on earth.

So, in addition to the paradoxes of comfort through suffering, faith through doubt, there is expressed in "The Deutschland" the further reconciliation of opposites: God the spiritual creator becomes man the physical being:

To God the Son, the Incarnation was an inconceivable condescension and humiliation; for man, it was an equally inconceivable exaltation. Hopkins had come to appreciate both aspects of this central mystery of his faith.<sup>8</sup>

It is a central Christian paradox. God not only works opposites, but exists in them: "Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm" (No. 28:9). Here we light upon Herbert Read's mistake in assuming that Hopkins's idea of God as judge and terrifying father was the main one of the poem.<sup>9</sup> The word "Father" for Hopkins does have disciplinarian overtones, associations with the lashed rod, but he is trying always to reconcile God's sternness with his affection:

"Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung? (No. 28:9, my italics). The prayer of this stanza, says Pick,

. . . is full of a realization of the paradoxes of divine love; its bitterness is sweet, its lightning is affection, and the crosses it sends are its greatest mercy.<sup>10</sup>

Be adored among men,  
God, three-numbered form;  
Wring thy rebel, dogged in den,  
Man's malice, with wrecking and storm.  
Beyond saying sweet, past telling of tongue,  
Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm;  
Father and fondler of heart thou hast wrung:  
Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then. (No. 28:9)







As illustration of the diversity of God's love and the methods of its working, Hopkins gives two instances of conversion (No. 28:10). This is a form of realization, and gives in concentration the sum of what he has been saying in Part the First; conversion can be either loud and sudden as it happened "once at a crash [to] Paul," or the soft and gradual sifting of heavenly love that came to Austin with "a lingering-out sweet skill." The vigour of the extract from the "Comments on the Spiritual Exercises" is repeated in: "With an anvil-ding / And with fire in him forge thy will." The example of conversion, then, is the final expression before the Second Part of the poem, of the central idea with which Hopkins began in Stanza 1 -- mastery by God -- "Thou mastering me / God!"

The senses of hearing and sight, an extra sense of upsurge in the stomach, diverse elements in man's make-up and that of the physical world have been used to convey the diversity of God's love and, indeed, the variety of ways which Hopkins himself found to express his own love for God. An atmosphere has been created throughout the ten stanzas which might pave the way for a "justification" for the shipwreck and loss of life of Part the Second.

The essence of the individual was precious to Hopkins almost beyond saying. A ship with two hundred passengers



was to his mind "two hundred souls in the round." (No. 28:12). Such is the substance of the second part of the poem. Dramatic in content, and fairly easy to follow if the reader gives due regard to the demands of the rhythm, it is the measure of Hopkins' concern for the fate of those on board as individuals. His concern for the individuals is, of course, fear that they do not realize what he has realized: the necessity for living as Christ, and viewing hardship and disaster as a re-enactment of Christ's suffering on earth. One must see God in physical nature, loud and soft, hot and cold, light and dark, a perilous amalgam of opposites. With this kind of vision, man's hopelessness against the harsher manifestations of nature vanishes. The destructive wind that follows the ship in stanza thirteen is "wiry and white-fiery" and filled with snow. Since the poet has already established the working of God even in the structure of disaster, the lightning of God in stanza nine is recalled in this stanza by "white-fiery." Without this vision of God's hand behind the horror, "Hope had grown grey hairs" (No. 28:15).

Hopkins's occasional habit of personification (as here of Hope) reflects his poet's vision and his priest's belief that God is inherent in everything. Philosophically it is fine, but poetically it can lead to trouble here and there, that is in places where the paradox comes into conflict with





what Hopkins is saying at a particular moment. This is precisely what happens in stanzas sixteen and seventeen, where he reminds us that "the burl of the fountains of air, buck and flood of the wave" (No. 28:16) are God's and, indeed, God, and is forced by this precept to conclude that they who struggle against the elements are struggling against God:

They fought with God's cold --  
 And they could not and fell to the deck  
 (Crushed them) or water (and drowned them). (No. 28:17)

The implications and overtones of this statement, which if developed would yield answers incompatible with the pervading thought of the poem, are left unprobed. It is one of the very few moments in Hopkins where we might wish that the independence of judgement he had as an undergraduate, his readiness to exhaust all sides of any question, had not been lessened, as seems possible, by his conversion to Catholicism, and entrance to the Jesuit novitiate in 1868.

However, to wish that is to wish the impossible, for in "The Deutschland" we do have an apocalyptic expression of a man's eager but difficult acceptance of Christ's call. And, as Part the First gives us Hopkins's particular experience as felt by himself only, Part the Second gives us this experience through the example of the Franciscan nun. In John Pick's words, "In the midst of the trial and suffering, of exile and shipwreck -- a story told with great power and even greater



beauty --." <sup>11</sup> The nun is a "lioness," and her voice, in stanza nineteen is heard over the storm's brawling. There follows a conventional contrast between her former environment and her present position. Hopkins shows how, with the suffering and subjugation of the soul the nuns have undergone in the cloister, they now have, in the storm, a kind of grace and safety. They are "sisterly sealed in wild waters" (No. 28: 23). Above this, as Pick rightly points out, "In heaven above Christ was waiting for [the nun] to respond to His Grace, . . . [and to] recognize in this trial a message for her to come to him." <sup>12</sup> This, as we have seen, is one of the fundamental themes of the poem: knowledge (or grace) to see behind the physical to the spiritual, and thereby to give the physical a new interpretation. As Gardner states it:

His Passion holds the promise of heaven in an otherwise 'un-shapeable' existence. This nun read the symbol aright. The pain and tragedy of life elucidate, and are themselves elucidated by the Redemption. <sup>13</sup>

Some critics have said that whatever we read in Hopkins is Hopkins himself, <sup>14</sup> and in the Franciscan nun lies his own religious experience. That Hopkins's enunciation in poetry of his religious beliefs is highly serious needs no argument; just how seriously personal it is, is seen if we compare the conventional contrast between the sisters in the shipwreck, "the prey of the gales" (No. 28:24), and the poet





at home safely in Wales, with the similar convention in Milton's "Lycidas." To put it simply, Milton blames the Nymphs and the Muse for their absence from the scene of Edward King's drowning; he blames everyone but himself:

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep  
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas? . . .  
. . . Ay me, I fondly dream!<sup>15</sup>

Compare this with Hopkins:

Away in the loveable west,  
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,  
I was under a roof here, I was at rest,  
And they the prey of the gales. (No. 28:24)

Admittedly the first is a pastoral convention, but humility (and contrition?) and seriousness are more to be found in the latter extract. With Hopkins's quality of putting experience into paper and print, rhythm and stress, the reader's emotions are stimulated more directly by the experience itself than by the easy opiates of mechanical flowings. In Hopkins, in addition to greater personal intensity, there is greater intensity of actual experience.

The truth of this is evident in the shape of "The Wreck of the Deutschland," which leads up in Part the Second, through vigorous questioning and suffering, to the answer to the question: "What did she mean?". What was the nun praying for by calling, "O Christ, Christ, come quickly." (No. 28:24)? The storm, stress, prayers, struggle, reach their



visionary climax in: "Thing that she . . . there then! the Master, / Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head" (No. 28:28). What is needed, then, is total absorption of man into Christ, not through loss of self, but through the most complete self-realization possible. So the paradoxes of the earlier poetry have reached a new, positive level of meaning in this intermediate poem. A vision of the kind Hopkins had is not easy to understand, the kind that makes a man say, after the shipwreck, "I admire thee, master of the tides" (No. 28:32).

Coming between the early verse and his great poetry, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is, obviously by reason of its difficulty, not wholly successful. At some points, the meter comes between the artist and the reader. But it stands as a refutation of the negativity we noticed in the early poems, and gives the full explanation of it. Hopkins had progressed from a vague perception of the relationship between God and man (because he had not developed a full awareness of the relationship between God and nature) to a vision in which physical reality was the word, expression, and news of God. Christ is the "Ground of being, and granite of it" (No. 28:32). As has been shown, the grounds were laid in the earlier poems for the later perception. What was implied by negatives then, is stated positively here. The central paradox is discernible, robustly expressed in "The Deutschland":





[Let him be] Pride, rose, prince, hero of us, high-priest,  
 Our hearts' charity's hearth's fire, our thoughts' chivalry's  
 throng's Lord. (No. 28:35)

It is the vigour of the road to serenity.

The road to serenity is not a serene road. Life may be a pursuit of serenity, but earthly attainment of that goal is guaranteed to no man. In later years of his mature period, Hopkins's former joys and doxological inclinations were harshly reversed. The riddle of life and death, and the contemplation of the terrifying mysteries of darkness and obscurity sent the poet gazing alarmedly into the nightmare of annihilation, insignificance, and sterility, as is best expressed in the "tremendous and undoctrinal chords of 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves'" (I, xxxvii).

Man's reality is bound up in opposites: light and dark, night and day, sorrow and joy, death and life. They must remain in balance. Man's perception, if allowed to dwell wholly on one grim aspect of these contrasting realities (darkness, for example), not only threatens to plunge him into devastating despair, but also forces him to see things as they are not -- "as through a glass, darkly" (I Corinthians 13:12). For Hopkins, and for the Christian, the assurance of the love of God in Christ is an absolute necessity. To forget this divine love removes all equilibrium, and life becomes nothing but death, and day, night. Hopkins's



experiences in the dark night of the soul, in the "terrible sonnets," threatened to destroy him in this manner. He saw darkness, suffering, and death beginning to preoccupy him in his own life. The "blear-all black" seemed to be engulfing all and was thereby eliminating life's light, its dichotomy, its meaning. Hopkins never went so far as to deny God's existence, but he did feel his grasp slipping.

In "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (No. 62), Hopkins has a nightmarish vision of a day -- probably the day of judgment -- when light and dark, white and black, or good and evil become the only two "realities." The problem for Hopkins is the seeming reality of dark, a seeming so powerful that he can barely contend with it. The darkness of the day of wrath, foreshadowed in this sonnet, spreads over all creation, consuming the "dapple" Hopkins loved so well (see "Pied Beauty," No. 37, for a particularly fine contrast to this sonnet), and submerging all colours, all shapes, and all the variegated joys of life. Even suffering, which earlier in his career had been sanctified and made meaningful by Christ's Passion and love, has distilled itself into the elemental torture-rack of white-right versus black-wrong within the fibres of the individual. All mankind will, on this apocalyptic last day, be packed "all in two flocks," sheep or goats.







Let life, waned,

ah let life wind  
 Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon, all on two  
 spools; part, pen, pack  
 Now her all in two flocks, two folds--black, white; right,  
 wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind  
 But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each  
 off the other; of a rack  
 Where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless,  
 thoughts against thoughts in groans grind. (No. 62)

Boyle explains:

The spools . . . are right and wrong (day and night). They represent the terrible struggle between the light and darkness of which the poem treats, of which St. John speaks at the opening of his Gospel. And now neither light nor darkness is in full force. It is the balanced and stretched ("equal, attuneable") hour of evening, in the soul that hour when vigor is gone and the soul is stretched between the will to serve God and the tendency to drop into the abyss of evil, when the light has waned and the darkness threatens but has not swallowed up the light.<sup>16</sup>

Disaster ("The Deutschland," No. 28), despair ("Car-  
 rion Comfort," No. 64), discomfort ("No worst, there is none,"  
 No. 65), loneliness ("To seem the stranger lies my lot," No.  
 68) are surely not universally desired or pleasureable, but  
 these grim aspects of life can, at least, be met, fought, and  
 even conquered. Giving Christ the mastery or Lordship, and  
 surrendering the selfishness of strictly personal battles to  
 Him, can make such black days sacramental in their purifying  
 and strengthening effect. However, as in "Sibyl's Leaves,"  
 when all joys are fled, and one's very personality is rent  
 into two threads -- one drawn toward heaven, and the other  
 toward hell -- it is impossible to take sides or pitch a



battle of any sort. One cannot simply capitulate to Christ, either, because now, in this last day, Christ is the judge. One can hope for nothing but the strength to endure the grinding bisection, and never to let go of the white, no matter how overwhelming seems the black.

Furthermore, I believe that the terrible sonnets, including the one discussed above, have specific psychological implications which also relate them to the Christian's experience of paradox and dichotomy in his life. All men suffer and are subjected to severe trials of mind, body, and spirit. Earlier in his verse (for example, "The Deutschland," "Peace," "The Candle Indoors"), the poet has shown how the correct, Christ-oriented perspective can, if not eliminate suffering, at least order it into a meaningful place in life and spiritual development. However, the poet had, at each new crisis, to remind and redirect his spirit to the presence of God in adversity. Because he was human, and therefore frail, this constant need for redirection Godwards in each critical moment eventually led Hopkins to a point where he had to ask himself if he was really correct; and he started to ask questions of both himself and God (and these questions were not always answered).

This intensive examination of his point of view was, in itself, a time of severe trial, when he felt that he was





facing the horror alone. He eventually finds himself on the rending rack of "Sibyl's Leaves," in the bruising combat of "Carrion Comfort," on the sheer precipice of "No worst, there is none," in the close and sweaty night of "I wake and feel the fell of dark," and in the dark desert of "My own heart let me have more pity on." In the latter sonnet (No. 71), beaten, tired, and going nowhere, he finally advises himself to stop trying to solve life's riddles and perplexities alone -- once again to let go, and let God:

Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise  
 You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile  
 Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size  
 At God knows when to God knows what. (No. 71)

We are led, thereby, into what I feel is Hopkins's finest poem -- the questioning, doxological, and triumphant masterpiece, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection." Alan Heuser says of it:

The most complete objectification and most successful resolution of the spiritual warfare came in [this] long sonnet of sprung Alexandrines and three codas. . . . Here the combat became the battle of the elements in storm around the central fire of nature (from Heraclitus and early Greek thought). Pagan pessimism in the mortal flux of nature and man confronted, and was reversed by, Christian optimism in the resurrection of the body.<sup>17</sup>

In any discussion of paradox in Hopkins, the question of individuality, haecceitas, "this-ness," must eventually be confronted. Time and again, in letters, journals, and verse, Hopkins extols that quality of distinctiveness which



makes each thing in creation unique. He saw the duty of each person to develop and preserve his own singular individuality and that of every other thing in God's creation. In explanation of this Hopkinsian (Gardner's word) motif, I offer here two brief quotations from an article by W.H. Gardner:

The Scotist principle of individuation embraces the celebrated and subtle distinctio formalis a parte rei or formal distinction between the individual nature and the specific or common nature (e.g. humanitas). That last formal determination, or ultima realitas entis, which restricts the specific form and completes it, is called by Scotus haecceitas ('thisness'). . . . Individuality then is the direction given to natural activities by the haecceitas: it is the real relation between the creature and God.<sup>18</sup>

Hopkins saw in Scotism a noble tribute to the dignity of man. It was natural that a poet as sensuous as Keats should agree with the philosopher who emphasized the greater importance of the concrete over the abstractions of the mind and who stressed the close relation between activity and substance; equally natural that an anthropophile as great as Wordsworth himself should share the Scotist conviction that humanity is too noble a thing to be a mere lump of clay acted upon by outside forces: . . . Man must use his freedom of choice to perfect his individual nature 'where it fails,' to give the whole being its true direction Godwards: 'Doff darkness, homing nature knows the rest.'<sup>19</sup>

However, would not the best expression of individuality be found in the man who sought to find and express himself independently of God? Does not Hopkins insist, as we have shown often in these chapters, that man must be "mastered," "subjugated"? Here is the crux of a paradox, then. How does one continue to be an individual, and, at the same time, to be God's individual?







The answer is not to be found in deft manipulation of logic, but rather in the ontological experience of a faith which encloses paradox within itself. Two poems, "As kingfishers catch fire" (No. 57), and "Heraclitean Fire" supply the resolution of this paradox. No. 57 poses the problem directly:

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves -- goes itself; myself it speaks and spells;  
Crying What I do is me: for that I came.

In Hopkins's eye of faith, there is more than brash individualism and non-conformity here, though. He goes on to say that the man of God reaches the pinnacle of "thisness" and individuality when he "Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is -- Christ." There is, then, no real discrepancy. The "just man" and Christ are not two separate entities. Instead, they share in being. The just man is seen by God as being Christ, and no less.

The same is true in No. 72, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection," but here the poet goes further. He demonstrates, in the middle of the poem, the futility of a "me-for-myself-alone" individuality:

Manshape, that shone

Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out; nor mark  
Is any of him at all so stark  
But vastness blurs and time beats level.



Man's individual uniqueness is not the result of chance or self-existence, but is rather ordered of and by God, who alone has the wisdom and power to allow man to achieve his haecceitas to the full. Only when man realizes that "I am all at once what Christ is" does his heretofore futureless peculiarity assume significant proportions. He becomes and "is immortal diamond" -- Christ.

One thing more, Hopkins observes, in "Heraclitean Fire," the fire and vitality of nature burning on endlessly. She seems never to be quenched, but always living and renewing herself. But nature's "bonniest, dearest to her, her clearest-selved spark / Man" seems to be continually caught, burned out, lost, and forgotten in the swift-moving flux of natural cycles. The poet then looks ahead to the moment of death -- the universal disaster awaiting natural man -- when every trace of his burning vitality will be swept away.

This contemplation catapults him into the triumphant assertion of the ultimate paradox -- the eternal reconciliation of life's dichotomy. (Note that the whole is expressed in imagery of light and dark):

Enough! the Resur-

rection,  
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days, de-  
jection.

Across my foundering deck shone  
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade, and mortal trash  
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire, leave but ash:





In a flash, at a trumpet crash,  
 I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and  
 This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal  
 diamond,

Is immortal diamond. (No. 72)

Here is the paradox: in order to live, he must die; before the Resurrection must come the descent into death; before the dawn, night is darkest. Blotting out by night and death is the way God has chosen to give man immortality. In this immortality, too, man is unique, for even the seemingly endless renewal of non-human nature will eventually be "but ash." Man alone has been ordained by God to become "immortal diamond."

The proclamation of this poem gives amplified significance not only to man's suffering and eventual death, but also fills his entire life with light, hope, and eternal significance. In the last analysis, Hopkins shows that man need be convinced of but two things: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," and, "I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am."

Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: . . . the Lord is his name. (Amos 5:8)



## APPENDIX

### A NOTE ON SUPERNATURAL LIGHT IMAGERY: "GLOW, GLORY IN THUNDER"

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamb is the light thereof. (Revelation 21:23, my italics)

Hopkins's "supernatural light" is none other than the "glory of God" of which St. John speaks. The term doxa (δόξα) in classical Greek means either "opinion," or else "reputation," and in particular a good reputation, and so "honour," "distinction." It is still somewhat obscure how the word acquired a new meaning which made it capable of translating the Hebrew kabor (כָּבוֹד).

Kabor means the manifestation of God's being, nature and presence, in a manner accessible to human experience; and the manifestation was conceived in the form of radiance, splendour, or dazzling light.<sup>1</sup>

The dazzling light was originally, perhaps, the lightning flash accompanying the thunder which for the naïve religious mind is the voice of God. In Judaism of the Christian era, the shekinah (שְׁכִינָה, "dwelling," or presence of God) was also conceived as light. Both kabor and shekinah are translated into English as "glory." It is, therefore, not surprising that "glory" (doxa) and "light" are found in paralellism when Biblical writers refer to the manifestation of the power of God for the salvation of His people. Thus in Isaiah 60:1-3:







Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. (my italics)

And again, verse 19 (which demonstrates St. John's source for the opening quote from The Revelation):

The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.

In the Bible, the ordinary, classical Greek use of "glory" (doxa) is common; but in places which speak of "seeing" the glory of God or of Christ (John 1:14, 12:41; Acts 7:2), we must recognize the spiritual meaning of the term. In John 12:41, for example, there is a reference to the vision of Isaiah described in Chapter 6 of his book. Isaiah says bluntly, "I saw the Lord." John, in accordance with the general tendency of contemporary Judaism, says, "He saw the glory of the Lord." Clearly, therefore, "glory" here means the manifestation of God's presence (i.e. kabor).

All of the above is plainly relevant to Gerard Hopkins. The "secular" poet's faculties are quite capable of apprehending "glories" in nature, and even "glories" of God, but only in the classical sense of great honour or distinction, worthy of profound admiration. However, it is only the eye of faith, such as Hopkins possesses, which can "see" the



genuine, spiritual kabor- and shekinah-glory of God in its universe. This parallel between the natural man and the man of faith is set down by Milton in Samson Agonistes thus:

[Semichor.] So fond are mortal men  
Fall'n into wrath divine,  
As thir own ruin on themselves invite,  
Insensate left, or to the sense reprobate  
And with blindness internal struck.  
Semichor. But he though blind of sight,  
Despis'd and thought extinguish't quite,  
With inward eyes illuminated,  
His fierie vertue rouz'd  
From under ashes into sudden flame.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, in Paradise Lost, Milton describes the workings of the inner eye of faith, blindness notwithstanding:

Thus with the Year  
Seasons return, but not to me returns  
Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summer's Rose,  
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;  
But clouds instead, and ever-during dark  
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off, and for the Book of knowledge fair  
Presented with a Universal blanc  
Of Nature's works to me expung'd and ras'd,  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.  
So much the rather thou Celestial Light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.<sup>3</sup>

God's glory is not natural, but can be perceived in  
and through natural things. Hopkins says:

I kiss my hand  
To the stars, lovely-asunder  
Starlight, wafting him out of it; and  
Glow, glory in thunder. (No. 28:5)







and: "Glory be to God for dappled things-- . . . All things . . . Praise him" (No. 37). It is through "all that glory in the heavens" (No. 38) that the poet gleans the love, power, and salvation of Christ. Notice, too, how the glory of which he speaks is organically bound up with the phenomenon of light and stars. This glory plainly must be the dazzling presence of God, "whose glory bare would blind" (No. 60, l. 108), and the sight of whom caused the skin of Moses's face to shine like the sun (Exodus 34:29-35). In a sermon on Luke 2:33, Hopkins writes:

And for myself I make no secret I look forward with eager desire to seeing the matchless beauty of Christ's body in the heavenly light. (V, 36, my italics)

Unfortunately for us, in our superlative-oriented, adman's world, the idea of "glory" has become a convention, a cliché. It is used to describe anything from a hot-fudge sundae to a display of the aurora borealis. Its connotative riches are lost through overuse, and its spiritual significance, even among Christians, is largely unintelligible. However, because Hopkins was a man with a keen sensitivity to words, and was, in addition, a professor of classical languages and a theologian, it is a certainty that he knew exactly what he was saying when he used "glory" in his verse. "Neither do I deny that God is so deeply present to every thing . . . that it would be impossible for him but for his



infinity not to be identified with them" (VI, 316). The dazzling glory of God's presence and power, the glory of the salvation of Christ, and the glory of the Holy Spirit's bright-winged comfort are constantly flashing, shining, and glowing out of the creation and the hearts of men which Hopkins viewed.

But, it is important not to lose sight of the main thrust of this thesis. The very scarcity of forthright "glory" imagery fortifies my continuing contention (See Chapter I especially) that Hopkins, in his verse, is primarily concerned with the theophany of nature, and the light of God which shines through and out of His creation. Hopkins's is not a mystical desire to transcend reality and be transported into an other-worldly, enraptured vision of God's glory at the expense of, and loss of, inscape.





## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter I:

- <sup>1</sup>Phare, Gerard Manley Hopkins.
- <sup>2</sup>Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins, 2 vols.
- <sup>3</sup>Boyle, Metaphor.
- <sup>4</sup>Downes, Ignatian Spirit; Heuser, Shaping Vision; Kenyon Critics; Immortal Diamond; Lahey, GMH; Peters, GMH; Pick, GMH, Ruggles, GMH.
- <sup>5</sup>The ratio is more than two to one.
- <sup>6</sup>The ratio here is three to one over colour.
- <sup>7</sup>Lynch, Christ and Apollo, 23.
- <sup>8</sup>Gardner, "A Note on Hopkins and Duns Scotus," Scrutiny, 62 & 66.
- <sup>9</sup>Pick, GMH, 49.
- <sup>10</sup>Hopkins's poems are referred to by number in Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 3rd edition, 5th impression, 1956.
- <sup>11</sup>Blake, "A Vision of the Last Judgment," Keynes's edition, 639.
- <sup>12</sup>Lynch, Christ and Apollo, 30.
- <sup>13</sup>Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins, II, 256.
- <sup>14</sup>References to the six volumes of the Hopkins papers are indicated in this study by the numerals I-VI, which are to be understood as follows:
  - I The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges.
  - II The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon.
  - III Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins.
  - IV The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins.
  - V The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins.
  - VI The Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins.



<sup>15</sup>"A Cradle Song," Songs of Innocence, Keynes's edition, 58, my italics.

<sup>16</sup>White, College Physics, 504.

<sup>17</sup>See Appendix.

## Chapter II:

<sup>1</sup>Dodd, Fourth Gospel, 202.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>3</sup>Smart, Jubilate Agno, ll. 271-72, 85:  
"For THUNDER is the voice of God direct in verse  
musick.

For LIGHTNING is a glance of the glory of God."

<sup>4</sup>Boyle, Metaphor, 28.

<sup>5</sup>Gardner, Notes to Poems, 222.

<sup>6</sup>Boyle, Metaphor, 21.

<sup>7</sup>Gardner, Notes to Poems, 241.

<sup>8</sup>E.J. Rose, letter to R. Marken, August, 1964.

<sup>9</sup>Boyle, Metaphor, 115.

<sup>10</sup>Compare Melville's poem "Art," Selected Tales and Poems, 411:

What unlike things must meet and mate:  
A flame to melt -- a wind to freeze;  
Sad patience -- joyous energies;  
Humility -- yet pride and scorn;  
Instinct and study; love and hate;  
Audacity -- reverence. These must mate,  
And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart,  
To wrestle with the angel -- Art.





Chapter III:

<sup>1</sup>Gardner, Notes to Poems, 220.

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 19-20 above.

<sup>3</sup>Bridges, Notes to Poems, 235.

<sup>4</sup>Rose, "Hopkins and Romanticism," Report, 13.

<sup>5</sup>Boyle, Metaphor, 94.

<sup>6</sup>McLuhan, Kenyon Critics, 25.

<sup>7</sup>I am aware of the other implications of "buckle" (e.g. shield and buckler; to buckle on a sword), but in any poem a richly connotative word or image must do just that -- connote. Therefore, the connotation of bending cannot be ruled out.

<sup>8</sup>Gardner, Notes to Poems, 251.

Chapter IV:

<sup>1</sup>Smart, Jubilate Agno, ll. 308-9, 92.

<sup>2</sup>Samson Agonistes, ll. 67-70, 553.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., ll. 80-89.

<sup>4</sup>Richard II, II, v, 38-41.

<sup>5</sup>Kierkegaard, Journals, 522.

Chapter V:

<sup>1</sup>Read, Essays, 334.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 335.

<sup>3</sup>See Eliot, "Burnt Norton," V, ll. 137-149:  
 Words move, music moves  
 Only in time; but that which is only living  
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,



Can words or music reach  
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.  
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
 Not that only, but the co-existence,  
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
 And the end and the beginning were always there  
 Before the beginning and after the end.  
 And all is always now.

<sup>4</sup>Boyle, Metaphor, 115.

<sup>5</sup>In this context, compare Christopher Smart's notion that impression is "a gift of Almighty God." In Jubilate Agno, Frag. B<sub>2</sub>, l. 404, he says: "For my talent is to give an impression upon words by punching, that when the reader casts his eye upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould wch I have made." W.H. Bond explains the line thus: "My talent is to give an impression upon words: a theory later expanded in Smart's introduction to his verse-translation of Horace (1767), I, xii: 'Impression then, is a talent or gift of Almighty God, by which a Genius is impowered to throw an emphasis upon a word or sentence in such wise, that it cannot escape any reader of sheer good sense, and true critical sagacity.' (Cited by Stead.) Smart's estimate of his own powers is revealed by comparing these passages. The imagery of the statement in Jubilate derives from the process of type-founding, in which a matrix receives the impression of a punch and is then placed in a mould to cast letters."

<sup>6</sup>Boyle, Metaphor, 94.

<sup>7</sup>Gardner, Gerard Manley Hopkins, II, 286.

<sup>8</sup>McNamee, Immortal Diamond, 239.

<sup>9</sup>See p. 61, n. 1.

<sup>10</sup>Pick, GMH, 46.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Gardner, Notes to Poems, 221.





<sup>14</sup>For example, throughout his study, Boyle interprets Hopkins's poetry biographically.

<sup>15</sup>Milton, "Lycidas," II. 50-51, 56.

<sup>16</sup>Boyle, Metaphor, 136.

<sup>17</sup>Heuser, Shaping Vision, 93-94.

<sup>18</sup>Gardner, "A Note on Hopkins and Duns Scotus," Scrutiny, V, 62.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

#### Appendix:

<sup>1</sup>Dodd, Fourth Gospel, 206.

<sup>2</sup>Samson Agonistes, ll. 1682-91, my italics.

<sup>3</sup>Paradise Lost, III, ll. 40-55, my italics.



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